Sisyphus Rising

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Sisyphus Rising

by LittleMargie

Summary

After the fall, Will wakes up in his bed in New Orleans. It's 1999, and Will makes a comprehensive set of goals.

1. Find Hannibal.
2. Kill Hannibal.
3. Find Garrett Jacob Hobbs.
4. Kill Garrett Jacob Hobbs.
5. Kidnap Abigail and become a single father.

He only gets around to that first one.

Old Time Feeling (Like Before)

He awoke in a bed.

Will couldn't remember hitting the water, but he must have, if he was trapped in blankets instead of waves. Breathing a sigh of relief, he closed his eyes, ready for sleep to drag him back down. His body hurt less than he thought it would, but Hannibal had likely pumped him full of morphine.

Hannibal.

Will opened his eyes again, hoping to find him somewhere in the room, sitting by his bedside perhaps, with questionably obtained 'chicken' soup.

What he saw hit him like a brick to the stomach, like a hospital bill on an empty bank account, like a twist at the end of a film.

Hannibal wasn't there. Penelope was.

The Rottweiler snuffed in her sleep, blissfully unaware that she had been dead for eight years, or that the bed she was on had been donated to Goodwill over a decade ago.

Will started to hyperventilate.

He was in 221 Vineland Road, apartment 4A. He had rented it while he was a detective in New Orleans. His dead fucking dog was here, and Hannibal wasn't.

Luckily, he remembered enough about the layout that he made it to the toilet before he started to puke.

Having woken from Will's scrabbling, feral run through the apartment, Penelope trotted along behind him, looking a little annoyed at the interruption to her beauty sleep, but dutifully sitting a vigil next to the porcelain throne.

"Am I dead?" Will asked her when he'd emptied out his stomach, laying the side of his face on the seat.

She cocked her head to the side but otherwise didn't respond.

He couldn't tell if he was relieved or disappointed that he couldn't add 'talking dog' to his list of problems.

Obviously Will wouldn't be in heaven, and Penelope sure as shit wouldn't be in hell (she was a *very* good girl), so he didn't really know where that put him. Purgatory maybe?

It could be another hallucination, but he didn't feel feverish and wild like he had with his encephalitis. It could be a dream, but everything felt startlingly real.

Well, no matter what the fuck was happening, he wasn't about to look a gift horse in the mouth, Penelope had been one of the best dogs he ever had.

"Come here, baby," he rasped, voice hoarse from his retching, and stretched out his arms, lifting his head from the toilet with herculean effort.

The dog came quickly, restraining herself from licking his face due to the somber mood, and Will wasted no time wrapping his arms around her, dropping his head to bury his face in her neck. Suddenly, he was glad that it was Penelope he was with, as she had been the biggest dog he'd ever had; it would be hard to get the same comfort wrapping himself around Buster or Zoe. The rottweiler dropped her head onto his own shoulder, a heavy, comforting weight, and the pair stayed that way until Will's breath had slowed to normal, soothed more by the smell of dog than he would be by anything else.

After some indeterminate amount of time that was at the very least a couple of hours (Penelope was a *very* good girl), Will finally felt stable enough to uncurl, giving the rottweiler a few very well deserved scratches under her collar before standing on unsteady feet.

"You gotta go outside?" he asked, smiling a little when Penelope huffed in agreement, stamping her front paws in excitement.

He steadfastly avoided looking in the bathroom mirror, scrounged a tshirt and some jeans from his matchbox closet, and dressed, refusing to look at his body as he did so. He was terrified of seeing Hannibal's smile on his abdomen, and he was even more terrified that it wouldn't be there.

The world outside his apartment was just as he remembered it: the swampy Louisiana air cold in the early morning hours, the diner across the street proclaiming 'open' with dull red neon. He had been half-convinced he wouldn't have been able to leave his apartment, or that the world would be the smooth, unnerving textures of Wally's half-loaded video games. He took a deep breath and tried not to cry.

Penelope wanted to go on a walk, but Will wasn't sure that he could emotionally handle that at the moment, so he ordered her to 'potty' and she did, giving him a stink-eye as she shit at the base of one of the sad hedges his superintendent planted years before.

Was this what purgatory was? Picking up dog shit? He supposed he had done worse things.

He threw away the poop bag and found enough change in the pockets of his jeans to get a newspaper. He refused to actually look at the date until he got back inside, ushering his unhappy dog up four flights of stairs.

After making sure Penelope had food and water, he made himself some slightly undercooked pancakes and burnt coffee, and forced himself to look at the paper as he ate his breakfast.

It was Saturday, March 27th, 1999, and Will had either time traveled, died, or gone completely insane. He was betting on that last one.

Silently, feeling as though he was completely batshit crazy, he ate the rest of his pancakes and drank his coffee.

“Coffee’s not as good as yours,” he told the empty room, “My pancakes are normally pretty decent though, I’ll make you some sometime.”

No one responded, not even Penelope.

“This is your fuckin’ fault by the way,” he continued, “I don’t know how, but it is.”

Hannibal remained silent.

Gingerly, as though the world might shatter, Will got up and washed the dishes, giving a dissatisfied huff before he ventured back into his bedroom and collapsed on his bed.

“I did not time travel; I am going crazy,” he told himself, words swallowed up by his pillow.

It was a little depressing that he couldn’t even believe himself.

He dozed for the next few hours, finally waking back up at 9am, Penelope sprawled over his legs like a weighted blanket. Hannibal still wasn’t there.

“Okay,” Will told his ceiling, “I was in training in March 1999. I worked from nine to five monday through friday. I became a homicide detective May first.”

The ceiling did not respond. Hannibal did not respond. Penelope didn’t even respond.

“If you’re there, Hannibal, now would be a really good time to wake me up.”

Will remained firmly planted in 1999.

“Fuck.”

He scrubbed his hands over his face before suddenly stopping, jerking them back and looking at them in horror. It couldn’t be.

Disentangling his legs from the blankets and displacing a sleepy Penelope, Will scrambled out of bed, almost falling over as he made a mad dash to the mirror.

There, plain on his face, were scars.

Though he looked as he did when he was younger, hair cropped a little too short, beard a little too long, teeth a little too yellow from the cigarettes he smoked, he had a long, thin scar across his cheek where the Dragon had slashed him, and the thicker, raised scar on his forehead where Hannibal had tried to take out his brain still remained, standing strangely on his younger face.

“I’ve gotta be dead,” he told his reflection, “Otherwise this doesn’t make any fucking sense.”

His reflection didn't confirm or deny it, simply showing his sweaty, pale face in the dim light. God, he looked so *young.*

"I'm going crazy," he murmured, and suddenly it was essential to see the rest of his body.

He shucked off his clothes faster than a teenager on prom night, and stood on his toes so he could see his torso in the mirror.

Grinning at him like the serpent to Eve, was the smile Hannibal had carved into his stomach.

Will threw up his pancakes.

At the sound of the noise, Penelope made her way dutifully back into the bathroom, looking thoroughly unimpressed that he was having a second mental breakdown in less than six hours. Giving an exasperated huff, she made her way behind him and started licking the skin behind his knee, presumably to ground him.

It worked, and Will came down from this panic attack much faster than his last one.

"I don't know what any of this means," he confessed, scratching Penelope behind the ears.

Her blank look communicated that she didn't either.

Since he was already naked, he got in the shower, scrubbing his body raw and pink before getting out and shaving his beard totally off. He looked even younger without it, but now he had an alibi. 'Oh, you've really never noticed my scars? They've always been there, but I guess they're more prominent without the beard.' He parted his hair differently and stared, deadeyed, at his reflection. He was dead, or hallucinating, or maybe he had been locked up in BSHCI for years, maybe Hannibal never got him out.

Hannibal.

Hannibal.

Hannibal.

The name rocketed around in his skull; he wanted the other man so badly he physically *ached.* Where was he? Was he dead in the water, or maybe alive, holding Will's corpse on the beach? Or maybe in Italy, sun-tanned and beautiful, with no knowledge whatsoever of Jack or Abigail or *Will?* Somehow that thought hurt the worst.

He could handle a lot of things, time and *Hannibal* had shown him that, but he didn't think he could handle Hannibal's indifference.

It was strange, knowing that he'd rather be dead than alive without Hannibal, but the thought was soothing somehow. It was a game plan, of a sort. Be with Hannibal. He wasn't really sure about the steps in the middle, but he knew the beginning (naked in his bathroom) and the end (with Hannibal in life or death) and that grounded him somehow. This whole thing was a little more manageable with an end goal.

Finally, he walked away from the mirror, not certain he could stand to look at himself any longer, the patchwork face of pre-Hannibal and post-Hannibal Will.

He dressed (and god, he forgot how bad fashion in the 90s was), foraged for his wallet (found in a coat pocket), and leashed up Penelope (still a very good girl), and set out, vague thoughts of buying more newspapers in his head.

He walked for a few hours, pleased that he still knew his way around the streets of New Orleans, and tried not to think about anything in particular. Once Penelope started dragging her feet he made his way back toward the apartment, tying her leash to one of the bars of a nearby bodega's window.

"You know kid, the library's got a lot of books you can get for free, got some English classes too," the bodega worker told him when Will layed a copy of every single newspaper and magazine on the counter.

"What?" Will responded, too overwhelmed by talking to another human being to come up with an intelligent reply.

"Oh, sorry. Thought you were learning English. S'How I did it when I was a kid, all the newspapers."

"You're Italian?"

"Didn't think I had an accent."

"No, you don't. You've got a-" Will gestured to the tattoo sticking out of the man's shirt, a poorly-done Italian flag.

He looked down and laughed.

"Oh yeah, got that when I was sixteen. Only paid a buck fifty for it."

"You know where I can get Italian newspapers?"

"Not in New Orleans. My sister ships me some sometimes though. I think I've got one in the back. It's a couple weeks old, but it's yours if you want it."

"Please."

As the man went into the back to look for the paper, Will contemplated how absolutely batshit insane he must look to him. He didn't really care though, people had said worse things about Will than 'avid reader'.

"Here you go," the man said when he came back, bagging up the old paper along with the ones Will had purchased.

"Thanks a lot, really," Will replied, forcing himself to look into the other man's eyes to drive home the sentiment.

“Sure, kid. Hope you find what you’re looking for.”

Will tried not to laugh. No, he really didn’t. Finding Hannibal would only result in chaos, no matter what the end.

The rottweiler was sitting dutifully where he left her, and, after untying her leash, the two headed home.

After the long walk, Penelope climbed onto the couch and immediately fell asleep. Will got himself a coke and a sandwich, laid all the periodicals on the coffee table, and settled in next to his dog, a pen and notebook just within his reach.

After whiling the afternoon away (his watch now read 6:03), he had managed to compile three lists:

1. Current events/ things that were appropriate to talk about with other people
2. Stocks that he should probably buy, just in case his vague murder/suicide plans didn’t pan out
3. A jumbled up timeline of where he, Hannibal, and Abigail would be for the next fourteen years

He didn’t really feel very accomplished when he was finished, but it was better than sitting around and crying.

After skimming through the Italian paper and not finding anything about ‘Il Mostro’, he set it aside, standing and cracking his back with a groan.

He used the restroom, leashed up Penelope, and followed his memory to his favorite diner. Once there, he ran into an old one-night-stand. Suddenly he remembered why he had stopped going.

Amanda, the pretty, red-haired waitress at the diner, had been sweet and funny and just the right amount of awkward that he actually thought he had a chance with her. One night, he had plucked up the courage to ask her out for a drink after her shift and the date had gone alright. When she invited him back to her apartment afterward, he made her cum a couple of times with his mouth, but he just couldn’t get hard. He had left his phone number, she hadn’t called, and he had dutifully avoided eating the best fried gator in Louisiana so he wouldn’t run into her.

Only, none of that had actually happened yet.

“Hey, Will!” she chirped from the hostess stand.

Suddenly he was very glad he had a reputation for avoiding eye contact.

“Amanda, hey. Good to see you.”

And it was, in a way. They had had some good conversations before he fucked everything up.

“Your usual table?”

“Sure, thanks.”

“Go ahead and sit down. I’ll bring a menu, as if you need it.”

He gave an awkward laugh at her teasing and went to go sit at his table.

Like many New Orleans restaurants it had an old-time feeling, an elaborate waist-high iron gate fencing in the outdoor patio. He had come here many times with Penelope, as it was within a mile of his apartment and allowed dogs, and he was suddenly grateful for the opportunity to be there again. Maybe he didn’t have Hannibal, but he had Penelope and fried gator. It certainly wasn’t the same, but it was something. Perhaps this was a Christmas Story situation, where the ghost of Christmas past shows him how good his life was without Hannibal.

Somehow, he had a hard time feeling grateful.

“Here’s the menu, and- oops! Sorry, I moved the ashtray to a different table earlier, let me get you one.”

“I’ve quit,” he said, a little too forcefully. It had been ten years since he had a cigarette, and his lungs certainly thanked him for it. Or, maybe it hadn’t been ten years. Maybe it had only been a day. It was certainly tempting, to lounge with a coffee and a cigarette, chainsmoking until the name Hannibal Lecter stopped battering the inside of his skull, but he really didn’t need to lapse back into his nicotine addiction on top of everything else. Or feed his current nicotine addiction? It was all very confusing.

“Oh,” Amanda sighed, and Will was a little confused to hear the relief in it, “I thought you were actin’ a touch strange. My mama quit a couple a years ago and let me tell you, she was mighty mean for two whole months. Not that you’re mean! I just meant that I know how you’re feelin’. Kinda.”

“Thanks,” he said with a genuine smile, relieved that he had stumbled on something that could excuse his strange behavior, “Felt like time for a new start.”

Wasn’t that the truth.

“Yeah, I noticed you cut your hair too.”

He hadn’t, only styled it differently, but he was pleased at the assumption; it meant his half-assed disguise was working.

“Yeah, I, um, I always kept it longer, and the beard too, because of the-” he gestured to his face, self deprecating, “but I figured it might be better, you know, working homicide- I told you I got promoted to homicide?”

She nodded.

“Thought it might make it seem like I’d, uh, lived to tell the tale.”

“How’d you get them? I’m sorry, that was inappropriate, I’ve never even noticed them before today, honest. I-”

“It’s fine,” he soothed, suddenly ecstatic that someone else could see his scars. He thought they might be hallucinations, but if Amanda could see them they might be real; if the scars were real, so was Hannibal.

“I got this one from a boat propeller, turned on while I was fixing it,” he explained, pointing casually to his forehead.

“Ouch,” Amanda replied, grimacing in sympathy.

“Wait til you hear about the other one. A buddy of mine cast his line back, didn’t know I was standing there. Caught me in the mouth and-” he hooked a finger in his mouth and pulled, demonstrating how the imaginary fish hook had sliced his cheek open.

The waitress flinched, and Will gave himself a mental pat on the back for coming up with such believable stories off the top of his head.

“God, that’s terrible.”

Will shrugged.

“Gave me more sympathy for the fish.”

“Hey sweetheart, you gonna stand there all day? I need another beer over here!”

Will glanced over at the other customer, an old man with a beer gut, and imagined cramming a beer bottle down his throat and choking him to death. Surprisingly, the thought didn’t really disturb him.

“Sorry,” the waitress said with a grimace, “Your usual to drink?”

“Sure,” he agreed, not really remembering what his usual was.

She left, and he perused the menu, more than pleased to get some good Louisiana cookin’ again. There hadn’t really been any good cajun places in West Virginia.

Amanda eventually came back with his drinks (a beer and a shot of whiskey, which Will almost laughed at), and, after taking his order (fried gator and turnip greens and mashed potatoes, with a plain baked sweet potato for Penelope), she melted back into the background, busy with the dinner rush. He took his shot of whiskey and watched people walk by, fingers absentmindedly rubbing Penelope’s ear as they waited for their food.

He saw Amanda a few more times as he ate, but she couldn’t really stay and chat, which worked out well for Will. It was bizarre, being back in New Orleans again, being back in the *past* , and Will found himself a little overwhelmed by the time he finished his meal.

He left Amanda a thirty percent tip, and left without saying goodbye.

Penelope, still excited about her unexpected sweet potato, trotted happily all the way home, tripping a few times over her too-big paws, and smiling up at Will like he was the greatest thing in the whole wide world.

She really was a very good girl.

The alcohol and food had made him feel a little better, a little looser, and by the time he got back to his apartment he wasn't as worried about the whole 'maybe time travel maybe dead maybe crazy' thing. Even though it was still pretty early, only about 8:30, he brushed his teeth and shucked off his pants, climbing into bed with Penelope and petting her as long as he could keep his eyes open, unwilling to take his extra time with her for granted. Eventually he slept, certain that he would wake up by Hannibal's side tomorrow.

He woke up in his bed in New Orleans.

"Fuck."

The next day was spent practically boarded up in his apartment. It had been easier, the day before, to think of this whole thing as some sort of hallucination, but it was clear when he woke up that he wasn't going to, well, *wake up.*

He spent the day talking to himself, talking to Penelope, and wishing desperately for Google Translate so that he could read the Italian paper still on his coffee table. In the early afternoon he traded an excess of coffee for an excess of whiskey, and he spent the evening absolutely plastered, still drinking in between vomiting sessions.

He hadn't drank this much since before he married Molly, he thought hazily, when it was finally late enough to justify going to bed. Then he realized he hadn't thought about Molly at all the day before, only Hannibal. Then he cried pathetically about how he didn't even miss his own wife as much as Hannibal, and about how Molly was probably better off without him.

No, not probably. Definitely.

The last thing he thought before drifting off to sleep was that this time, he wouldn't give himself the chance to hurt her.

He awoke at 7am, tired, hungover, and still firmly planted in 1999.

After a few moments of deliberation, he decided to just roll with it. At the moment, there wasn't much else he could do.

He brushed his teeth, took Penelope for a walk, bought some donuts at a local shop, and ripped all of the shoulder pads out of his suits. By the time he got to work he was ten minutes late, but he looked a little more presentable than he usually did, face clean shaven once more.

"Someone call CPS and get this baby out of here," Gutierrez razzed goodnaturedly when Will stepped in the door.

Jose 'call me Joe' Gutierrez was one of five homicide detectives in Will's precinct, and, unfortunately, partially responsible for training him. A self-proclaimed 'funnyman', he drank excessively, smoked excessively, fucked excessively, and got fired three years into Will's career for very publicly beating the shit out of his wife on their front lawn. Will could have happily gone the rest of his life without ever seeing him again. Of course, Will didn't often get what he wanted.

"Yeah, just felt like it was time for a change," Will responded lamely.

"Change back!"

One of the other detectives, Will couldn't see who, snorted, but it was mostly just Gutierrez himself that laughed at the joke.

"Hey, when the fuck'd you get your face cut up?"

That question came from Bryan Slade, a weasley looking man who wouldn't know the word 'decorum' if it bit him on the ass. He stood short, at five foot five, but had a sharp, piercing gaze that made you feel like you were the small one. He wasn't technically in charge of training Will, but Slade often made everyone else's business his business, so he was a sort of de facto teacher.

Another thrill zinged through Will at the realization that someone else could see his scars.

"Yeah, yeah, real fuckin' funny," he replied, trying to seem embarrassed instead of elated.

"No, really. When the fuck'd that happen? I just saw you on Friday."

Will looked over at Slade, doing his best to seem confused.

"Before I joined the force, you really never noticed?"

“I didn’t notice because you didn’t fuckin’ have them.”

“Don’t be an idiot, Slade,” Maloney groused, “You can’t scar over a weekend, they’d be fresh.”

John Maloney was the detective Will had been brought on to replace. A good old Irish catholic with zero tolerance for bullshit and a high tolerance for alcohol, Maloney was looking forward to retiring with his wife to Florida and never having to see another dead body again.

“Okay Maloney, then why didn’t I notice them before?”

“Cause you’re a shit detective,” Maloney volleyed back, not looking up from his paperwork.

“I shaved, as Gutierrez pointed out,” Will interjected before Slade could respond, “They’re more noticeable, can I get back to work now?”

“How’d you get ‘em?”

Will relayed the stories he had told Amanda on Saturday, gratified to see the other detectives cringe.

“Are we fuckin’ done with story time now?” Maloney asked, looking a little green around the gills after the fish hook explanation. “Graham, you’re with me today, we’re following up on some leads for the Cooley case I found over the weekend.”

Will gratefully accepted the file passed his way, and read it over as Maloney put on his coat and drained his coffee.

“Oh, I remember this one,” he murmured to himself.

“I sure fuckin’ hope so, it only happened Thursday,” Maloney replied.

“It’s the step-daughter, she killed him.’’

“How’d you figure?”

That was something he liked about Maloney, the willingness to hear out theories that contradicted his own. It was something that Will had tried his best to imitate, but had never really succeeded in.

“She’s left handed, look at the blood spatter pattern, it would have to be done by someone left handed, shorter than him, which she is.”

“Plenty of people are left handed, Graham.”

“Not plenty of people getting shipped off to boarding school next semester. She has a boyfriend, a little younger than her, easier to manipulate, a… year younger? She’d have told him, he’ll be easy to crack, he’s in over his head.”

The whole case had taken two weeks to close last go around. Will had solved it then, too.

When he looked up from a file the other detectives in the bullpen were looking at him as though he had grown another head. It, unfortunately, was a familiar experience.

Will shrugged.

“Or maybe not.”

If he was working with Gutierrez he would have pushed his theory, but where Gutierrez prized aggression, Maloney responded better to humility.

Maloney nodded, working it through in his mind.

“We’re already going to see the widow, we can ask about her daughter’s boyfriend, pick him up when school gets out. Now, are we gonna stand here all day or are we gonna go?”

The mom identified the boyfriend, Will and Maloney picked him up after school, and he sang like a bird before they even reached the precinct, eager to get the guilt off of his chest.

All in all, Will and Maloney had closed a case with only an hour of overtime, which Maloney couldn’t have been happier about.

“I’ll actually be home in time for dinner today, Mary will be happy. You did some good work today, kid. You’ll be getting your own cases in no time.”

He certainly hoped so. It had only been one day and he was already irritated at being under someone else’s thumb.

After walking back to his apartment, he leashed up Penelope, his mood improving as they walked through the neighborhood.

What did he want to do? The orangesicle sunset painted the sky as he contemplated, and it was beautiful, it was, but he observed it passively, as though it was happening in a film rather than to him. Hannibal would likely have something poetic to say about it, Will could practically hear it in his ear: “A beautiful ending for the day, how strange that an ending should take place in your new beginning. A reminder, perhaps, that you do not *need* to begin again. I imagine your ending will be just as beautiful, my dear Will.”

Could he do that? Reject this fresh start, take his own life? He did not want to start anew, did not want anything other than what he had, flying through the air with Hannibal, sacrifices to the sea. Perhaps, if he ended it all here, he would wake back on the cliff, or perhaps he would wake elsewhere, in a different point in time.

But what was the alternative? Play out a life like an old man in a young man’s clothes? There was once a time he would have jumped at the chance to never meet Hannibal, but now such a thing seemed... sacrilegious. He felt cleaved in twain, as if he were a walking monstrosity, organs spilling from his open side, veins hanging from his flesh like frayed wires.

He thought of Hannibal now as he navigated the cracked city sidewalks. They were exactly a decade (and a few months) apart, so Hannibal would be 36, flush with life and full of himself, a surgeon in the city of Florence. Will was filled with both longing and revulsion at the thought of Hannibal so young. He longed to know him, know every part of him, and had often imagined him in youth while he had sailed across the Atlantic, but this Hannibal was warped, rotten. As Will had been halved so had Hannibal. Neither could exist without the other, so to have Hannibal exist, happily, without Will seemed… sinful. To live without the other was to spit in the face of God.

He would find this serpent of Eden, but this time he would not be Eve. He would be the mongoose, foaming at the mouth for a taste of snakeblood.

Though he felt invigorated by his plan to fly to Florence and murder/suicide himself and Hannibal, he abruptly changed his mind when he got back home, the red blinking light of his voicemail calling to him like a beacon.

“Hey there, Will. It’s yer daddy, just callin’ ta see how yer doin’. Gimme a call back when ya can.”

Will sat on his floor, cradled his phone, and wept.

Desperados

Chapter Summary

A homecoming, of sorts.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will's father had died January 1st, at 12:55 AM. The coroner's report had listed cause of death as hypothermia, and had noted the concussion William Graham Senior had obtained from vehicular trauma had likely knocked him unconscious, unable to move indoors. It had been one of the coldest nights in Shreveport history, and it had been exactly four days since William Graham Junior had moved to West Virginia.

In short, an unidentified car with an unidentified driver had been intoxicated, swerved onto the sidewalk, and committed a hit and run.

Will had flown back down to Louisiana immediately, more a wreck than he had ever been, and tried to solve the case. Access to police information had been easy, while he had never worked in Shreveport, he had still been a Louisiana detective, and they gave over the files readily. Will's mental reconstruction of the crime scene had been overloaded with details about his father- he had been staggering home, wasted, after a celebratory mourning period, happy that his son was in the FBI, sad that he would move so far away, and was holding his jacket instead of wearing it, feeling no need with warm whiskey coursing through his veins. He had never even seen the car, having been hit from behind. He went to death unconscious, only one block away from his home, laid out on a sidewalk underneath the New Year's fireworks.

Even with his gift, however, Will could never solve the case. There was simply no design. Just an unfortunate mistake that anyone could make.

Will's father had died in 2004, and Will's father had left a simple voicemail on Will's phone in 1999, but somehow, by God or insanity, the latter happened after the former.

Will didn't really give a shit about timelines. All Will really cared about was his dad.

After he stopped shaking enough to actually dial the number, he did, trying to school his breath into something other than hyperventilation.

His dad answered on the second ring.

"Billy Graham 'ere."

Will jerked like he had been electrocuted at the sound of his father's voice, stunned into silence.

"Cat got yer tongue? Who da hell is dis?"

"It's me, Daddy."

The words came out shaky, uncertain, slurred more than said.

"Well hey, Junior! Guess ya got my voicemail. Ya doin' alrigh'? Sound bad."

Will laughed, quiet and manic, tugging a little on his hair to ground himself.

"Yeah, I just um… I quit smokin'. Started a couple a days ago, really feelin' the cravings right about now."

Billy whistled low between his teeth.

"Yer gonna be a goddamn bitch fer weeks."

Will laughed again, a fierce and painful love unfurling in his chest.

"Somethin' like that."

The line was silent for a moment. Billy had never been much of a talker, and Will couldn't figure out what to say. He could hardly tell his daddy he was from the future, but at the same time, he wasn't the same person he used to be.

"Alrigh', son? Yer awful quiet, mus' really be jones'n fer one."

"Yeah," Will agreed, though he had never wanted a cigarette less, "Hey Daddy, could you just talk to me? I don't think I can talk right now, just wanna listen to you. I miss you."

"Ya sure it's jus' cigarettes ya comin' offa? Ya don' sound good."

"Just cigarettes, Daddy. You know I feel too much."

"Yeah, I knaw, son. Ya still havin' nightmares?"

"Not for the past couple nights."

"Dat's good. 'Member how I used ta make you tell me, and I'd change 'em? Use ta make ya laugh and laugh."

"Mostly you'd just change the nightmares to make the monsters fart a lot," Will said, lips quirking up in a smile, "Don't quit your job to be a comedian anytime soon."

"Naw, ya was a strange lil boy, but ya was still a lil boy. E'ry lil boy likes fart jokes."

Will thought about Walter, about how Will had never given better advice to his stepson than "you'll get over it." He could have done the same thing that his father had done for him, but

he never had. He had with Abigail, and his heart ached as he remembered talking in the hospital garden with her and Hannibal about her nightmares. Hannibal had often tried to talk through them with her, while Will would make her giggle, suggesting stupid things like reimagining everyone in her nightmares with Jersey accents and spray tans. “Perhaps that would only make them more terrifying,” Hannibal had suggested, both men smiling as Abigail laughed.

He had known. He had always known that Molly and Walter were surrogates for Hannibal and Abigail. He had known, and he had married Molly anyway. Perhaps that was more monstrous than any of the murders he had committed.

“You’re a great dad.”

Much better than Will had ever been.

“Oh, well, I dunno ‘bout dat,” Billy deflected. Will could imagine him rubbing a broad hand across the back of his neck, cheeks flushing to match his perpetually red nose. They had always been bad at compliments, the Graham boys.

“Say, I tell ya ‘bout da hog I shot las’ week?”

“Tell me again.”

He did. For the next hour, Will let his father’s slurred cajun voice wash over him like a tide, listening as Billy told him about the work he was doing on the Illinois river in Oklahoma, about the feral hog problem the state had, about the hundred dollars he had won at a Choctaw casino (“wish ya were here, Junior. Always was betta at countin’ cards”), about the bartender he thought he might have a chance with, how she had given him a free drink when he won an armwrestling contest.

“Well, I think dat’s ‘bout all I got ta talk ‘bout. Ya still wan’ me on da horn? I think I got a copy of White Fang ‘round here, could read ta ya like I used ta. No, dat’s not good fer nightmares. Think I got a copy of Walden too; dat might be betta.”

“No, I’m fine. Thanks, Daddy.”

“Oh thank da lord, I done ran outta whiskey and da phone cord don’ reach da kitchen.”

Will laughed, a full belly laugh that he hadn’t felt in years.

“Well, go get your whiskey. I’ve gotta walk Penelope anyway.”

“How’s she doin’?”

“Still a very good girl. How’s yours?”

Will couldn’t remember what dog(s) his dad had in 1999, but he knew he had at least one. Like father like son.

“Big blue? He’s doin’ okay. Sleepin’ on da couch right now, da lazy ass. Dwayne down at da yard said his bitch jus’ had puppies, so I’m libel to go down an’ see ‘em. Blue’s been lonely since Moby died.”

“You gonna get the runt?”

“Always do.”

The two men chuckled together.

“Hey, Daddy?”

“Yeah, Junior?”

“Can I come up and visit you sometime soon?”

“Well sure, I’d like dat a whole lot. Monday and Tuesday are my days off. Ya could come help me wif da boats if ya stay longa.”

“That sounds good. It’s been awhile since I got my hands dirty.”

Or had it only been days since the Dragon? It felt like a lifetime, like a beautiful dream still remembered, years later. His brain was being turned into a mobius strip.

“I’ll check with my captain and call you back.”

“Okay, ya stay safe now, boy.”

“I will, Daddy. Bye.”

“Bye, Junior.”

The line clicked dead.

Will felt alive.

He sat there for a long, long time, the rush of his blood raging against the stillness of his body. His mind seemed to be going a mile a minute into empty air, processing quickly but processing nothing. His father was *alive.* His father could *stay alive* with something as simple as changing his flight, perhaps not even scheduling one. Who was to say that he *had* to go to the FBI? He could make himself happy, make his Daddy happy, if he dropped it all to work on boat motors in Oklahoma.

Only, that wasn’t really right. He couldn’t be happy without Hannibal. It was what he longed for most, to wake, back in Hannibal’s embrace, before they hit the ocean. It was sick, twisted, disgusting that he would go back to his Daddy being dead, just for the privilege of dying in Hannibal’s arms.

He had no privilege now, for the Hannibal in Italy was not his.

But should Will die? Hannibal, of course, would need to be bathed in blood, a knife in his belly, a slash on his throat, penance for crimes not yet committed, but should *Will* die? Only a few hours before he took solice in his suicide, but now he wasn't so sure.

He would walk around, beastly and deformed, missing half his heart, half his brain, as he let the ghost of his doctor reign terror in his mind but…

A half empty glass is still half full.

He had lived through encephalitis, lived through imprisonment, lived through Hannibal tearing through his life like a hurricane, perhaps he could bear this injustice. Maybe he hadn't lived at all, maybe he was already dead, his personalized hell a life so close to the one he wanted, a life that never quite fulfilled.

What tragedy his life had become: himself Tantalus, Hannibal the sweetness of forbidden fruit. How the water withdrew!

"My name is Will Graham, I am in my apartment in New Orleans, and it is-" he had to stand so he could read the clock on the wall, "-9:47 pm."

The statement hung stagnant in the air, accomplishing nothing but a greater ache for Hannibal.

Walking with shuffling feet like an old or injured man, Will made his way to the front door, whistling through his teeth, sharp and high, to call Penelope for her walk.

A gentle set of thumping feet indicated that she had been sleeping on his bed, and she trotted out of his bedroom with head held high, ready for her evening constitutional.

The walk was short, Will twitchy and aggravated and Penelope aggravated that Will was aggravated, and they soon were back in the apartment, Will clicking the leash off her collar.

She was another good thing he would leave behind if he followed Hannibal into the dark. His dad would probably take her, and the two of them would commiserate together, Billy drinking too much and Penelope not eating enough, until they wasted away. It was a depressing thought.

As he passed through the living room on the way to the bedroom, a notebook on the coffee table caught his eye. It was the lists that he had made on the first day after the fall. He scooped it up, sitting on the couch instead of going to bed.

There, in his own scratchy handwriting, was the list he had made about Abigail Hobbs.

The Hobbs family had never left Minnesota, but they had moved four times before finally settling in the house that Will had killed Abigail's father in, an inheritance from Abigail's maternal grandmother.

Perhaps, if Will was getting a second chance, Abigail could get one too. He knew where she was, what her parents' jobs were, all he had to do was get on a plane.

The only thing tying Will Graham to Abigail Hobbs was the piece of paper he was currently holding. With his knowledge of forensics and lack of association, the crime would be nearly unsolvable. The Hobbs' currently lived in a house on the edge of some woods, a couple of miles away from any other property; it would be easy to break into the house, and no one would hear the screams. He would kill Abigail's mother first, a blade across the throat while she slept, and he would easily incapacitate Garrett Jacob Hobbs, he wasn't a killer yet, and would be confused and terrified.

Will would render Hobbs unrecognizable.

When he was finished, he would grab Abigail and take her home.

She would be little, only two, and she would forget her parents in time, would likely start calling Will 'dad' before even a year had passed. He would give her a good life, and he would never *ever* kill a girl who looked like her, would never feed her human flesh.

He would quit his job, move in with his daddy, tell him that an old girlfriend had offed herself, that she had named Will the father in her suicide note, that the Grahams were little Abigail's only family. Billy Graham would help however he could, knowing all too well how hard it was to be a single dad. After Abigail was old enough to go to school Will could likely move them out and get a teaching job, something that lined up with school hours.

An amber alert would likely be sent out, her poorly rendered aged-up face might grace the backs of milk cartons, but she looked like Will, with her brown hair and blue eyes, and any news about her disappearance would likely be confined to the midwest, easily swallowed up by other stories about kids with richer relatives.

Abigail would have a good life with Will, and Will could scrape together a semblance of happiness as her father.

It would not be the three of them, laughing together in the garden, but it would be something, and it would be his. A birth by blood.

Slowly, through the echo of imagined screams, Will became aware of a wretched sobbing sound, and a high pitched whine. As though coming out of a fugue state, he realized that *he* was the one sobbing, his body shaking as he wept, and that his hands were wet with dog spit, Penelope whining as she licked them, scared to see him so lost in grief.

"I'm okay," he reassured, voice coming out broken and wet.

Penelope huffed, nosing at his hands until he put them on her head.

She had been a service dog when he got her, a reject from the program because she preferred paying attention to other dogs to paying attention to her charge. She had been a godsend while he worked in homicide. She was certainly a godsend now.

“You look like shit,” Guiterrez greeted him the next morning.

“Oh, give the kid a break,” Fuller replied, looking up from his paper at Will, “Heard about the case you closed yesterday, good job. You want a donut?”

Out of all the detectives, David Fuller was probably the one Will liked best. Though Fuller stood just as tall as Will, he was twice his size from side to side. However, Fuller was far from being intimidating, always ready with a smile and good advice. While Guiterrez had the charisma of a car salesman, Fuller had a gentler way of going about things, and was often asked by other detectives to step in for interviews of kids and battered women. He wasn’t a saint, but he was a little less of a bastard than all the other detectives, Will included.

“I’m good, thanks though.”

“Your loss,” Fuller said with a shrug, taking a bite out of the offered donut.

“You know if the Captain’s in?” Will asked, trying his best to act casual.

“Sure is,” Fuller answered, “Best go in now ‘fore his coffee wears off.”

Nodding curtly, Will breezed through the bullpen, stopping to knock on the captain’s door.

“Come in.”

Will did.

Loic Lebeau was a thin, wiry man who had been offered Captain only after another detective had turned it down. His desire to never work a day in his life had lead him to accept the position, and both good and bad detectives flourished under his lack of supervision. Will hadn’t had a problem with Lebeau until he had applied for the FBI and Lebeau had refused to write a reference letter. Will still wasn’t over that, even though it hadn’t happened yet.

“Graham. Heard about the Cooley case, good work on that,” Lebeau said, not even looking up from the crossword he was doing on his newspaper.

“Thanks. I was wondering if you have a minute.”

“If you’ve got a problem with another detective, best just work it out with him. I’m not your goddamn kindergarten teacher.”

“It’s not that, I was wondering if I could get some time off.”

That made Lebeau look up, glaring through his round wire glasses.

“How much?”

“Two weeks.”

“Two weeks!” Lebeau practically yelled, outraged, “You’re not even a fucking detective yet!”

“That’s why it’s the best time, I won’t have any cases assigned to me. If I take the time right after I finish training then I won’t have a caseload to shove off on the others, you won’t have to pick up any slack.”

Appealing to the Captain’s lazy nature seemed to work, his deepset eyes glinting as he considered it.

“Crime gets worse the hotter it gets, you know.”

“Yeah, I know. I’d be back midmay, and if I use up all my vacation time now, I won’t be able to take off in summer. And I’ll owe you one.”

“You’ll owe me more than one, Graham, if you show back up. You sure you ain’t just running? If you’re not cut out for homicide you best tell me, so we don’t waste time training you.”

“I’m not running,” Will lied, “Just got some family stuff to take care of.”

Even though he was only getting a reduced salary while training, it was still more money than he would be making on boats. Toddlers were expensive, he would need what he could get. Besides, there was no use burning bridges before he had to; if he couldn’t muster the nerve to kidnap Abigail he needed a plan to fall back on.

“I’m holding you to that, Graham. You’ve got May 1st through May 14th, you owe me.”

“Sure,” Will agreed, already turning for the door, “Thanks, Captain.”

It was time to set his plan in motion.

May 1st dawned bright and clear, the lazy New Orleans heat slowly permeating down to the bone. It would be drier in Muskogee, less humidity, so Will savored the weather while he could, taking his time on Penelope’s morning walk. She looked back at him every minute or so, unable to enjoy herself while nervous about the suitcase that she had seen beside the door.

She needn’t worry, she was coming too.

He spent the morning savoring, taking in the city as Hannibal would often take in a glass of fine wine. It was very possible that he would never see it again. Will may have the upper hand with his familiarity, but Hannibal was still Hannibal, and it was very likely he would kill Will when Will went to Florence. A sweet thrill shocked through Will when he thought of Hannibal’s hands round his throat, his lips wrapped around a forkful of Will’s flesh. Though he wanted to kill Hannibal, it would be no great tragedy to lose.

He spent the morning eating beignets from Cafe du Monde in Jackson square, eyes flying across the Italian paper he had gotten his first day back. While he certainly had a long way to go, he had been learning Italian from cassette tapes checked out from the library, and, after a month, could manage a decent conversation if he tried, which he did almost every day with the bodega owner, Gabriel. The immigrant clearly thought Will was strange, but was more than happy to converse with someone in his mother tongue.

After walking around awhile, Will ate lunch at his favorite diner, and even invited Amanda to sit with him, sharing his french fries as they swapped stories of bad bosses and terrible customers; Will had spent a good amount of time waiting tables in high school. She laughed too loud at his jokes, and twirled a finger around a lock of her hair, but Will had never been less interested, his blood burning with the thought of being so close to Hannibal. He left a twenty dollar tip on a twenty dollar meal, and told her he'd see her around, the words tasting sour on his tongue.

After a particularly long walk with Penelope and a final sweep of his apartment, he loaded his dog and his suitcase in the car, and set off down the road.

It would take around ten hours to make it to his dad's house in Muskogee, Oklahoma, but since the first day of Will's leave was Saturday, he decided to break the drive into two days, stopping in Shreveport for the night.

Penelope stuck her head out the car window for the first half hour, but got bored quickly, spending most of her time laying in the back seat. Will spent the time singing along to Johnny Cash, the drive was just long enough to listen to the American Recordings in their entirety, and listen to a couple of favorites twice.

He booked a room in a shitty motel, ate crawfish in a hole-in-the-wall restaurant that near set his mouth on fire, and walked Penelope, smiling as she huffed around the unfamiliar territory. He hopped around a few bars until he found a band he liked, and drank whiskey sours until he had to concentrate on seeing straight. A pretty brunette kept trying to get his attention, but she looked like a kid to him. It was strange, how people his 'age' looked twenty years too young. He waved off her flirting and walked back to his motel room, letting Penelope out for a bit before crashing onto the lumpy bed.

The next morning was hardly spectacular. He walked to a coffee shop with Penelope and a raging hangover in tow, then nursed a latte while laying in bed, watching a John Wayne rerun on the old TV. He left at 11, ate pancakes at a run-down diner for lunch, and drove the rest of the way to his daddy's house. He got there at 5pm, about an hour after Billy got off work.

The Oklahoma sun warmed the afternoon, casting the run down house in a golden light. Weeds grew tall in the front lawn, and the house could certainly use a fresh coat of paint, but Will knew the inside of the house would be clean and well-repaired; Graham men took good care of what little they had.

The screen door opened just as Will opened the door to the back seat, and Penelope bounded out to greet the blue pit bull and floppy yellow puppy that exploded from the house, barking and yapping in excitement as they circled each other in the yard.

“Hey there, Junior!” Billy greeted, raising a hand to wave.

Will looked away from the dogs and almost keeled over.

His dad was so *young*.

Billy Graham had only been twenty years old when Will was born, now he was 46. Looking at his father, it was jarring to realize that he was only a little older than Will had been. Was. Would be. Whatever.

A good old boy and proud cajun man, Billy Graham would have been handsome if his life hadn’t been so hard. Hard labor and hard drinking had aged him to look a little older than he was, but his tanned skin crinkled charmingly around his eyes. He was missing a few teeth from bar fights and a few fingers from shop accidents, but he had Will’s jawline and his thick head of hair, so he never wanted much for company. Like Will, he lived on the fringe of society, his appearance and penchant for drinking kept him from being friendly with the middle class, and his love of classic literature and strict moral code kept him from truly fitting in with the other blue collar workers. He had strong arms, a strong mind, a dead wife, and a bizarre son. Will loved him fiercely.

“Whatchu starin’ at? Can’t a got dat ugly.”

Will laughed.

“Nah, just glad to see you Daddy, it’s been a while.”

“Dat it has. Come give yer ol’ man a hug.”

Will went eagerly, and they gave each other the classic ‘man hug’ with way too many slaps on the back.

When Will went to pull back he was held fast, his father’s three fingered hand gripping the back of his scruff.

“Da fuck happen ta yer face, boy?” he asked, brown eyes roving over Will’s scars.

“Accidents, sir. Look worse than they are.”

Billy clenched his jaw, clearly unhappy with the answer, but let his son go.

“Well, best git yer shit. I’ve got gumbo on da stove and a new batch a ‘shine. We can drink while it cooks.”

“Getting me drunk won’t make dinner taste better,” Will teased as he walked back to the car, getting his suitcase out.

“Just ‘cause yer grown don’t mean I can’t woop ya, boy! I’ll make ya cut a switch, see if I don’t.”

Will laughed.

“I’ll give ya somethin’ ta laugh ‘bout,” Billy threatened, smiling all the while.

The two men went into the house, leaving the door propped open for the dogs. Will set his suitcase by the couch before joining his dad in the kitchen.

The room was cramped, like the rest of the house, but the afternoon sunshine filtered in and the smell of gumbo made it homey. As Billy stirred the pot Will examined the smattering of mason jars on the counter, each filled with clear liquid and labeled with some sharpie on tape. Will picked up a jar labeled ‘apple.’

“You doin’ flavors now?”

“Sell better to folks who ain’t used ta ‘shine. Try some.”

Will poured a healthy portion into a glass and sipped.

“Damn, that’s good.”

“Amen. Pour mo’, we’ll sit outside.”

Will did as he was told and the two men went outside, sitting on cheap plastic lawn chairs while the dogs swarmed up to them, happy for company.

Will pulled the puppy up on his lap, laughing as it licked his face.

“Decided ta name him Ol’ Yeller,” Billy said with a grin.

“Gonna have a whole color wheel ‘fore long,” Will replied, one arm held out to the side so the dog wouldn’t lick at his whiskey.

While Big Blue had passed away a year before his daddy, Ol’ Yeller had still been alive when Billy died. Will had taken the dog in, but it kept running away, and had ended up dying on an old dirt road in Wolf Trap only a few months later, run over by a neighbor’s truck.

Will had cried a long, long time when that had happened, but it spurred him into his dog obsession, collecting more and more until he finally reached seven. As though that would make up for the one he couldn’t save.

He really, really missed his dogs.

“So, gonna tell me how yer face got fucked up?”

“Just accidents,” Will lied, looking at the puppy so he wouldn’t have to look at his dad, “Boat propeller turned on while I was fixin’ it, that’s the forehead. And I got caught in the mouth with a fish hook while back, some city boy didn’t know how to cast.”

“Why didn’t ya call me?”

“Embarrassed mostly. They were both just… stupid mistakes.”

Billy nodded, eyes narrowed.

“Awful sharp fish hook, must have been. Awful dull propeller, too.”

“You sayin’ somethin’?” Will snapped, turning to look at his dad. The puppy hopped off his lap, falling over it’s too big feet to nip at Penelope’s ankles.

“Jus’ dat a propeller woulda took yer head clean off, and a fish hook couldn’ta done yer cheek dat way. I ain’t fuckin’ stupid, boy.”

Will didn’t respond, eyes back on the dogs as he drank more moonshine.

“Is somebody-” Billy broke off, voice more vulnerable than Will had ever heard it, “Will, is somebody hurtin’ ya?”

That got Will looking back at his father; Billy almost never used Will’s name, substituting it with son or boy or Junior. As Will stared, he was surprised to see the fear and *helplessness* on Billy’s face.

I’m scared I can’t protect him, scared that New Orleans is too far away, scared that he’s bitten off more than he can chew with his new job, he’s always been so sensitive. When’d my little boy grow up? When’d he start lying to me? When-

Will looked away, overwhelmed by the information overloading his brain, his mirror neurons firing rapidly.

“I ain’t one of your runts, Daddy. Don’t need no protectin’.”

Hannibal had known that, had always seen the wolf where others had seen the pup, had always been content in the knowledge that Will was just as much a beast as he. Hannibal had known he hadn’t ever truly needed protection, and yet Hannibal was what he most needed protection from. Will’s daddy had been right, somebody *had* been hurting Will. It had been *glorious.*

“Yer my son, Junior. I’ll always wanna protect ya.”

Will looked out into the distance, taking in the sunset purple sky. Then he shrugged.

“Fair enough.”

Billy, obviously not expecting such a nonchalant response, started to laugh, prompting Will to laugh too. Will tried to savor the moment, sitting with his daddy in the sunset, tired dogs at their feet and whiskeys in their hands, Billy’s crows feet crinkling in just the same way Will’s did. ...Would. Will was glad he had stopped here instead of going straight to Florence.

“Ya’d tell me if somethin’ was happenin’, wouldn’t ya?” Billy asked when their laughter died down.

“I would,” Will lied, “It’s taken care of though.”

Billy pursed his lips, surprised but somber.

“Ya kill ‘im?”

Will nodded. He wasn’t sure if he had killed Hannibal with the fall, but he certainly would when he got to Italy.

Billy let out a long, slow breath before swallowing the information with a gulp of moonshine. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

“Dat why ya goin’ ta Italy? Ya runnin’?”

“Naw, don’t nobody know. Jus’ thought I deserved some time off ‘fore I get promoted to detective.”

“Like ya did with Paris?”

Will shrugged, thinking back to his low budget trip after he got his first degree. He hadn’t been able to afford anything other than hostels and cheap food, but had enjoyed the trip, enjoyed tramping through the streets like a stray dog, speaking cajun french and smoking cigarettes as he walked around the city. He hardly planned on similar sightseeing when he reached Italy, but his father didn’t need to know that.

The two men were silent for a while, watching the sun go down as they sipped their drinks.

“Anythin’ ya wan’ me ta say if abody come a knockin’?” Billy asked, looking out onto the horizon.

“Just that I got scarred from a propeller and a fishhook. You’re a fisherman and a boat mechanic, you know it happens all the time. Ain’t nobody gonna come though. I took care of it.”

Billy nodded, lost in thought. After a minute he knocked his boot against his son’s shoe, his missing-tooth-smile wide when Will looked over.

“When my boy’d get so grown, eh? One minute yer four foot tall, next minute yer a man. How’d dat happen?”

“‘Bout the same time you got old, I guess,” Will replied with a smile.

“Ya lil’ shit,” Billy griped, his grin still wide on his face, “Oughta beat ya ‘stead of feed ya. Speakin’ of, gumbo should be done.”

The two Grahams hauled themselves out of their chairs, the dogs following in their wake as they went back in the house.

The rest of the visit stayed away from dangerous topics. After dinner, the Grahams talked about more mundane things, and the next day was spent either working on an old boat in the shed or heckling newscasters on Billy’s TV. It wasn’t much, but not much was perfect. Even if he died in Italy, Will was thankful he got a few extra days with his dad.

The drive to the airport the next day was mostly silent, his dad having exhausted almost all avenues of conversation during Will's visit. Billy had never been much of a talker. Country music poured out of the radio as they drove to the Tulsa airport, but Billy turned it down when they got close.

"Ya still gettin' back on da eighth?"

"Yeah. I'll call if somethin' changes."

Billy opened his mouth to argue, but Will cut him off.

"I'll pay the long distance fee, don't worry."

"Wadn't worried," Billy lied.

Will huffed a laugh, but let it drop.

"Thanks for lookin' after Penelope by the way."

"Aw, she's a good girl, ain't no problem. 'Sides, she love puppies. Give Blue a break from gettin' his ears chewed on."

The two chuckled, though they quieted as the car pulled into the dropoff lane.

After putting the car in park, Billy turned to clasp his son's shoulder.

"Yer a good man, ya hear? A good man."

Will laughed, more out of awkwardness than anything.

"Yeah, I hear ya. Thanks for drivin' me, Daddy. I'll see you soon."

"See ya, Junior."

And with that, Will got out of the car, got his suitcase out of the trunk, and watched his daddy drive away. Only when the car was out of sight did Will turn and walk inside the airport.

It was time to kill Hannibal.

Chapter End Notes

Hey everybody!! I've got a few notes for this chapter, but first off I wanted to thank all of you beautiful people!!! I was overwhelmed by the amount of love the first chapter got, and started writing this chapter pretty much immediately afterward. I'm honestly suuuuuuper busy (I work in the healthcare field, so I'm essential) but those comments and kudos definitely made me prioritize writing for my free time. I've already started

writing the next chapter (where we finally meet Hannibal, yay!) and I'll try to have it out in the next week or two. Okay, now for the notes!

1. I'm from Texas, and believe you me, I've got an accent, but it's pretty different from how cajuns talk, so I just kind of tried my best. If Billy comes out sounding a little more texan than cajun, I apologize!

2. Tantalus, who Will likens himself to, is a greek myth, a man cursed in the afterlife to be hungry and thirsty, surrounded by water and fruit that always withdraws when he reaches for it.

3. You may notice that two of the detectives are named Bryan Slade and David Fuller, a little homage to Bryan Fuller and David Slade. That's where the likeness ends though, how they look or anything Slade or Fuller do in the stories is in no way reflective of the real people! Also, in the last chapter I named a detective John Maloney and a dog Penelope, but that wasn't meant to represent John Mulany and his dog! I didn't even notice it until my sibling pointed it out, lol. But hey, lets roll with it.

4. I've been to Shreveport and New Orleans quite a few times, but I really only go to the parts of Oklahoma right over the Texas border, so geography may be a little inaccurate in OK.

5. Would HIGHLY recommend the American Recordings by Johnny Cash and also apple moonshine. But maybe not at the same time, unless you wanna be depressed.

And I think that's it! Sorry the notes are kinda long, feel free to skip past them in the future; they'll mostly just be admitting ignorance to geography, explaining greek myths, and recommending country music. Again, thanks for all the love! Everybody stay safe out there! Please wear a mask when you go out <3

Danse Macabre

Chapter Summary

I slithered here from Eden just to sit outside your door.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The flight was unbearable. Though he had splurged for first class and drank an excess of champagne, it was still terrible to be so close yet so far. The *waiting* was the worst, and he tried not to look too suspicious in his impatience.

He had packed his service weapon and a particularly nasty hunting knife in his suitcase, and though they weren't strictly illegal to bring on a plane (the twin towers wouldn't happen for years), he still didn't want anyone to have reason to search his belongings.

It would be better to get in and out of Italy as discreetly as possible.

Finally, *finally* the flight touched down, and Will made his way to the taxis, directing a driver in beginner's Italian to take him to a cheap hotel.

The place he ended up in was a little nicer than he wanted, but iPhones still wouldn't be invented for a decade, he could hardly search Tripadvisor for hotels. He supposed he could walk around until he found something suitably shady, but walking around with a suitcase was practically asking to get mugged, and besides, the taxi driver probably got a kickback for bringing tourists here, and Will had seen the photo of the guy's kids taped to the dashboard. All seven of them; he certainly needed the money.

The concierge spoke english, and Will was flush with cash, so it was easy to arrange lodgings, and he paid a little extra to be right next to a side entrance, claiming he was a smoker so the employee wouldn't get concerned by his need to come and go unseen by staff. It wouldn't be very prudent to walk through the lobby covered in Hannibal's blood, after all.

Despite his twitchy constitution, he forced himself to collapse on the bed, eyes already falling half closed. Between the long flight and the time difference it was hours after midnight, and he wouldn't be getting anything done yet anyway. The Monster of Florence would strike the next night, but Will would hardly try to stop him. He was no one's police dog anymore, no one's 'sweet man'. Right and wrong had been dashed along the cliffside when he fell, *before* he fell, even. There was only Hannibal, and blood, and beauty… and Will would not tolerate that which stood in his way.

No, Will had timed his trip carefully, not to stay Hannibal's hand, but to slither into his dragon's den. Glutted from his hunt, Hannibal would be tired and sated, looking for his bed,

not the shadows in the corner. Will would lurk, Will would strike, and Will would kill. Then, when the monster was vanquished, Will would eat him. A final feast of flesh, a final tribute to a ghost.

He wouldn't have time to hunt when he became a father, after all. Best to savor the kill while he could.

His sleep was fitful, and he tossed and turned through most of the day, waking in the early afternoon. With plenty of time, and no need to fear being recognized, he strolled through the city, soaking in the Italian sun and drinking wine and coffee. He ate simply, too nervous to truly appreciate the food, and avoided museums, unwilling to run into Hannibal before he planned to. It was hardly the ideal vacation day, but he had business to attend to. There would be a couple of days to play the tourist after Hannibal was dead.

Night fell softly, gorgeous pinks and purples painting the skyline before slipping into black. The stars jeweled the sky in abundance as Will walked back to his hotel, the constellations encouraging him. Perhaps Hannibal would join the heroes of old, would splay out across the night with the likes of Hercules and Perseus, and give Will something to pray to. Will could hardly pray to God, even after what had happened, but he thought he could pray to Hannibal.

Forgive me, darlin' I have not sinned, hail murder instead of Marys. Will could make a rosary from the bones in Hannibal's fingers, drink his blood like holy water. Eat of my flesh, eat of my flesh, eat of my flesh and have eternal life. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. My flesh is the real food, and my blood is the real drink. Eat of my flesh. Eat of my flesh. Eat of my flesh.

How Will could *worship* him.

With his blood singing hymns in his veins, Will retrieved the weapons he had packed and stalked through the alleyways to Hannibal's house. For better or for worse, this would end tonight.

Hannibal's house in Florence had been listed in his FBI file- which Will had definitely not kept in a locked desk drawer so he could get drunk and cry over it while Molly was asleep- and thus Will knew exactly where it was. There hadn't been a picture in the file, but there had been an address, so- even though Will had definitely not looked up all of Hannibal's known properties on google earth while he thought about family and teacups and regret in the middle of the night- he knew how to get there.

Only having to stop once to ask for directions from a drunk at a bus stop, Will soon found himself on the right street. The house was more understated than most of Hannibal's properties, but still had an easy, old-world elegance that Will could readily appreciate. Lovely white stone walls with painted black window panes evoked an almost film noir aesthetic, and well-trimmed ivy splashed color across the doorway, a lush and welcoming spotlight on the door.

Who was Will to refuse?

The lock was picked easily, and Will was soon immersed in the golds and burgundys that painted Hannibal's walls, just as beautiful and deadly as his home in Baltimore, if a little more ostentatious; Hannibal's taste would only refine as he grew older; if he survived the night, that was. Gun drawn, Will stalked through the house, making absolutely certain that Hannibal was gone. The house was quiet, however, only Will's ragged breath to break the silence.

It was more painful than he had imagined, being here. Will had expected nostalgia, sorrow even, but instead he felt buried alive in a coffin, nose to nose with a corpse, knowing the dead would not rise, knowing he would never truly leave.

He had not expected how painful it would be to kill someone who was already dead.

After confirming no one else was in the house, Will went back to the door, dragging in a chair from the dining room so he would be able to comfortably lay in wait. He positioned the chair to be concealed by the opening door, giving him the advantage of seeing Hannibal first. There would be no whispered words, no pretty threats, this Hannibal did not deserve this from him. He would ambush, he would kill, and he would bathe in the blood of the imposter, would cut open the changeling's ribcage and writhe around inside. He would feast like the devil on the blood of the damned, let sinew catch in his teeth as he tore from the bone. Was there any pleasure greater than biting down to *chew?*

"I'm going to kill you," he spoke aloud, his voice soft and southern in the heavy foriegn silence.

It was a risky thing, to speak. Though he knew that Hannibal would kill tonight, he hardly knew when. The finer tunings of forensic science had yet to be played, and all la polizia had been able to tell was a general timeframe of the murders, not the exact hour. It was certainly possible that Hannibal could hear him on the doorstep, could be alerted to his presence, could ambush the ambusher. Will hardly cared. *This* Hannibal hardly deserved an explanation, but *his* Hannibal did. In the lack of a man to talk to, Will spoke into empty air, as one might speak to God.

He imagined Hannibal as he had been before the fall, bloody and beautiful, close cropped hair and a shine in his eyes. With Will's vivid imagination, he could almost conjure the man, and the sight sent a pulse of pain through him.

"I'm going to kill you, Hannibal."

The words dropped from his lips like hail, icy and dangerous.

"You wanted a becoming, didn't you darlin'?"

The endearment seemed profane, blasphemous, heated and holy. He had called Molly 'sweetheart' and 'sugar', sweet words from a sweet man, but Hannibal's only sweetness was like honey, thick and viscous, trapping flies.

"Can I call you darlin'?"

Only silence answered.

“I would have liked to, I think you would have liked it too. What would you call me? *Darling* perhaps, or something foriegn, caro or chérie. Would you use your native tongue on me? Ma moitié, suis-je à toi? Would you call me lover? Bedelia said you loved me.”

The imagined Hannibal spoke no words, Will’s mind too free of fever to grant him the visions that he wished. Will wanted to run his hands across the lines of the older man’s face, the lines that the Hannibal of this world would not have.

“I don’t know if I love you. I think I must, I feel *everything* for you. You burst me at the seams, drown me like an orlatan in brandy, I’m *consumed* by you, Hannibal. I’m voracious and condemned. I *hate* you. I *hate* you for leaving me. We were supposed to *die together,* Hannibal, to *be together* in all things, for all time. You were *mine* and now you’re *gone.”*

The last words were snarled, beastial and searing. Hot, feverish tears fell from Will’s eyes, and he averted his gaze from the imagined Hannibal, banishing it as easily as it had been conjured. It wasn’t *fair.* Wasn’t fair that Hannibal was drenched in blood in the streets of the city, while Will could only sit here *aching.* How dare he walk around a man while Will bled out of his patchwork body, torn apart and ripped like a child by a wolf.

Perhaps he could live, deformed and disgusting, without Hannibal, but Hannibal would not live without him. He would see to it.

“I’m going to kill you, Hannibal.”

The words hung in the air, a promise, an apology, and an exaltation all in one. Will did not speak again.

Hours passed, but Will was a fisherman, used to standing still. Eventually, after time had lost its meaning, the door opened.

Two clicks along the hardwood signified that Hannibal’s dress shoes had entered the foyer, the man himself surely inside them.

A pause, a deep breath, and suddenly the door was slammed open wider, colliding into Will.

He wasted no time.

Blindly reaching an arm around the door, Will caught Hannibal by the front of his shirt, pulling the man forward as he kicked his back leg, slamming the door shut.

Though the house was dark, the light from the window illuminated the face of Will’s prey, causing his breath to turn rabid. Hannibal was celestial, his smooth bronze skin and high cheekbones painting a picture of ambrosial youth, the maturity of the face Will so loved nowhere in sight. In the painted glow of starlight and street lamps he looked a member of the fae, beautiful, ethereal, and not quite right. Will hated this face as much as he worshiped it, and his own features turned to a snarl.

The younger Hannibal looked upon the younger Will, hand stayed from violence out of curiosity. Or, at least, that's what Will supposed. He could not bring himself to look into the changeling's eyes.

Hannibal's lips parted.

"May I ask what-"

Will punched him square in the mouth.

Due to Will's hand still holding his shirt, Hannibal could not stagger backward, and so he used the momentum to ricochet forward instead, boomeranging his head into Will's. The impact sent Will staggering back, his hand letting go of Hannibal in a split second of shock. Hannibal used the lapse to his advantage, landing a kick right to Will's stomach, sending him deeper into the hallway.

Will fell to the floor, using his new position to his advantage to kick Hannibal's legs out from underneath him, reveling in the pained grunt Hannibal gave off when he landed on the floor. Though Will had left his gun by the chair in the foyer (too impersonal) he still had his hunting knife, and he drew it, slicing into empty air as Hannibal rolled sideways

"Have you decided-"

"You don't get to TALK TO ME," Will snarled, enraged by the imposter's audacity to stand where Hannibal once stood.

Leaping up like a rabid animal, Will slashed blindly at Hannibal, not doing much damage, but catching and a ripping a shirt sleeve with the tip of his knife as Hannibal stood, exposing Hannibal's forearm with only a faint red line on the skin to show that Will had harmed him at all.

Will lunged again and Hannibal sidestepped, sending him crashing into a wall. Hannibal came up behind him, using his body to trap Will, and Will blindly stabbed behind him, satisfied as he felt the meat of Hannibal's thigh give way to his knife.

Grunting in pain and surprise, Hannibal loosened his hold for a second, giving Will the space he needed to turn around.

Wasting no time, Will ripped the knife out of Hannibal's leg, intent on driving it into the other man's throat, but Hannibal was just as quick as he, even with an injury, and caught Will's hand, deflecting it and driving the knife into Will's upper arm, catching the knife as Will released it and tearing it out to throw it back toward the front door.

Will snarled at the loss of the blade. Will's hands would have to be the murder weapon now. It would have to be… *intimate.*

Hannibal opened his mouth to speak once more, and Will brought the hand not held by Hannibal up, punching him as hard as he could in the gut. Hannibal doubled over, and Will placed his hands flat on the older man's back, pushing him down as he brought his knee up to

double the damage. As he raised his knee, however, Hannibal caught it with both hands, yanking it sideways so Will would crash to the floor.

From this vantage point Will could see straight into the kitchen, the kitchen which would have *knives.*

He tried to kick Hannibal's legs out from under him again, but Hannibal would not be fooled twice, darting out of the way and landing a harsh kick to Will's ribs. Will responded by kicking up, hitting him square in the crotch.

It wasn't necessarily in line with the aesthetic of the whole thing, but if Will didn't find a way to get off of the floor, Hannibal would likely kill him.

A cry of pain left Hannibal's lips as he assumed the universal 'I've just been kicked in the nuts' posture, and it gave Will just enough time to stand, chest heaving and aching from the likely broken ribs.

Wasting no time, Will bull-rushed Hannibal just as Hannibal straightened, using the force of his running collide to knock them both into the kitchen.

They clattered against the kitchen island, both grunting from the impact, and Will reached to the side to grab a knife from the knife block.

He was quite rudely interrupted when Hannibal hit him in the face with a decorative bottle of olive oil.

The bottle shattered, as the glass was quite thin, and Will was soon soaking in olive oil and blood, dozens of tiny cuts scattered across his cheeks. The rest of the bottle soon broke across the tile, Hannibal releasing it in favor of wrapping both his hands around Will's oil slick throat.

Will closed his eyes, unwilling to look at the unfamiliar face, and threw an arm behind him, desperate to reach the knives. They only barely brushed his fingertips.

Lightheaded, Will laughed as he felt Hannibal's fingers dig into his throat, wasting precious breath on the *exhilaration* of the moment. There was no great shame in being killed by a giant, but as Hannibal was Goliath, Will was *David,* and he knew just what to put in his slingshot.

"When I die," he rasped, voice wretched and torn, "I'll give Mischa your regards."

The killing hands loosened in surprise, and Will wasted no time shoving Hannibal away, opening his eyes and sliding onto the counter to reach the knives.

Though the shove was only at half-strength, the olive oil on the floor prevented stable footing, and Hannibal's feet slid out from under him, a scream of agony leaving his lips as he fell on his back atop the jagged glass pieces of the broken bottle.

Knife in hand, Will slid from the counter to land atop the other man, screaming as well as his knees hit the floor, torn open on broken glass as he straddled Hannibal.

This was it, the moment of truth, of baptism, of *benediction.*

Will brought the knife over his head and stabbed it down, grunting as Hannibal caught his forearms, catching him at a stalemate as they warred over the blade. Perhaps Hannibal had the luck of a god, but Will had the righteousness of a man condemned, and he would not suffer to lose, not now. Not when his rapture was within his reach.

Hannibal had told him once that he needed no sacrifice, but Will would provide one anyway. Flesh and bone proffered to the memory of a ghost, the salt of Will's tears mixing with oil and blood. Would this revenge taste as sweet as the desserts that once graced Hannibal's table?

Hannibal had once cast him as Patroclus, but now Will was Achielles, driven by grief, haunted and hunted by the ghost of his beloved. For how Will loved him! He would not, *could not* admit it to himself before, but here, frenzied and murderous, he could think of no greater pleasure than to be loved by Hannibal, to love him in return. Only when he could not have his heart's desire did he acknowledge it, ever the martyr, ever the master of self-flagellation.

He hurt as the sinner hurts when they raise their eyes to God. He hurt as Judas hurt when he kissed the face of Jesus. He hurt as Persephone hurt, torn from the land of her lover.

Unable to look upon this imposter's face, Will's gaze fell to the older man's arms instead.

Through the slashed sleeve of Hannibal's left arm, Will could see a long scar. A scar that fell along the radial artery.

Only once before had Will's breath left him in such a fashion, and he felt as he did then, gutted. He gasped, quick and shallow, as he took in the scar he knew so well, the scar that he had caused. He knew, that if he cut the other sleeve, there would be a matching one.

"Hannibal."

The name came as barely a whisper, Will's arms going slack as he finally, *finally* looked at the other man's face.

Though Hannibal's face was young and flushed, he looked the same as he had looked when Will bit off a chunk of Cordell's face; his smile indulgent, his eyes worshipful.

"The very same, my darling Will."

" *Hannibal."*

The man in question loosened his grip, and Will quickly cast the knife aside, barely listening as it clattered on the tile floor.

Now that he was looking at Hannibal he couldn't tear his eyes away. He was younger, the same way that Will was younger, but there was a *knowing* in his gaze that betrayed his age. Laid as he was on the floor, his hair was stained crimson with blood, the red pooling on the

tile around him like a halo. Surely he looked as Lucifer looked, freshly dropped from heaven.

“Beautiful.”

Hannibal’s mouth did not move as the word was said, and it took Will a moment to realize that he himself was the one who spoke. He leaned forward, still straddling Hannibal, and cradled the other man’s face with his right hand, his left hand landing in the pool of oil and blood, propped on the floor to stabilize him. The older man’s hands came to Will’s waist, thumbs rubbing soothing circles on his hipbones as he pressed his cheek into Will’s bloody hand, an imitation of one of Will’s dogs.

“As are you, mylimasis. Like Gabriel in your righteous grief, divine.”

A sob stuttered out of Will’s chest, and he ran his thumb across Hannibal’s cheekbone, leaving a bloody smear.

“Why didn’t you say anything?”

Hannibal chuckled, a mere huff of breath leaving his lips.

“I tried.”

Will smiled, or at least he thought he did. His face pulled like boiling water, bubbling and unstill.

“You could have tried harder.”

“And deny myself the privilege of dying by your hand?”

“God,” Will breathed, the same way a dying man would start a prayer, “You’re such an idiot.”

Chiming like church bells, their laughter flew around the high ceilings of the kitchen, relieved in its familiarity as the two men smiled at each other.

“For you, perhaps,” Hannibal replied, eyes shining as they flicked across Will’s face.

Will licked his lips, the taste of blood and laughter still pressed upon his tongue.

Through his relief and his elation, rage bubbled in his skin.

“How long have you been here?”

Here was not the house, not Florence, not even Italy, but they both knew the meaning of the words.

“March 27th of this year.”

The same day that Will had awoke. Hannibal had been here as long as Will had, and Hannibal had not tried to find him. The thought enraged Will, more even, than he had been enraged by the thought of Hannibal not knowing him.

He wrapped his hands around Hannibal's throat.

"How *dare you,"* Will snarled*,* hands slick with oil and blood, "*How dare you live without me."*

"Never," Hannibal rasped, "Never without you."

His hands lifted from Will's hips, but did not move to stop his own murder, instead, they reached up, cradling Will's cheeks with all the tenderness of a lover.

"Atleidžiu tau savo meilę," he whispered, eyes still open to look into Will's, hands still so soft and sweet upon his face.

Will simply could not let Hannibal die without understanding his last words.

Lifting Hannibal's head by the hands still wrapped around his neck, Will smashed the traitor's skull into the tile. Hannibal went limp, and said no more.

By the time Hannibal woke up, Will had already stripped him of his ripped clothing, leaving him in nothing but his ridiculous silk underwear, and was doctoring the stab wound on his thigh, carefully stitching the flesh as he kneeled before his adversary.

"You are lucky you missed the artery," Hannibal murmured, drowsy from his concussion.

"Or unlucky," Will replied, not looking up from his work.

Hannibal flexed his hands, testing the knots that Will had used to tie him to the chair.

"Lucky, I think. If you wanted to kill me you wouldn't be tending the wound."

Will didn't reply, but slapped the half-stitched wound harshly, smiling as Hannibal hissed through his teeth at the pain.

They didn't speak again until Will finished his work, caressing with the same hand that had administered the slap along the flesh, sweet and soothing. He finally looked up, staring straight into Hannibal's eyes.

“What did you say… when my hands were on your throat?”

Hannibal’s hand reached toward Will, then went lax when it was clear he could not reach him.

“I said… that I forgive you.”

Will scoffed, more at himself than Hannibal.

“We are veritable fonts of forgiveness.”

“After all, it is easy to forgive one’s self,” Hannibal replied, voice honeyed and tender.

Will nodded, repeating the words that so often bounced around his brain: “We are conjoined.”

“A holy union,” Hannibal agreed.

Will smoothed another hand across Hannibal’s thigh, an imitation of a lover’s caress.

“What did you truly say?” Will asked, looking back at the stitches, “The direct translation.”

Hannibal said nothing until Will’s unsure gaze found its way back to him. Though Hannibal was physically bound, Will felt just as arrested by the pull of his eyes, amber and hungry.

When Hannibal spoke the words they were tender, flower petals falling from his lips.

“I forgive you, my love.”

A cry ripped from Will’s chest with the speed and ferocity of a bullet, and his head fell to his beloved’s knee, arms wrapped around Hannibal’s calf like a worshiper clinging to the feet of a god.

He wept into the skin, and though the salt of Will’s tears surely stung Hannibal’s wound he made no sounds of pain, only cooing and shushing Will as though he were a child, hands straining against the bindings as he tried to touch him, rubbing his wrists raw.

Slowly, Will reigned his breath back under his control, looking up to Hannibal with tears still shining in his eyes.

“How dare you,” Will snarled, hot tears spilling down his face, “How dare you call me your love when you *abandoned me.* ”

“I would never, my love-”

“Don’t!” Will commanded with a flinch, “Don’t call me that, don’t-”

“My life is perfect here,” Hannibal interrupted, “when I lived in Florence I wanted for nothing.”

Will let out a pained whine, reminiscent of a kicked dog as he buried his face back against Hannibal’s leg.

“Don’t, don’t, please, don’t, Hannibal, *please-”*

“I tell you this not to hurt you, but for you to understand why I wanted a reprieve before my death.”

That caused Will to pause, a huff of air leaving him in a gasp before he looked up at Hannibal, eyes shining.

“What?”

“In my desk drawer, in my study, is a plane ticket to Louisiana, dated for May 24th. It is a one way ticket, Will. I did not plan to come back.”

“Liar,” Will breathed, his traitorous heart beating wildly.

“See for yourself. I can hardly stop you in my condition.”

Will hesitated, biting his lip. On the one hand, he desperately wanted to see it, to see proof that Hannibal had not forgotten him, had not cast him aside. On the other hand, they were in the dining room, and the thought of leaving Hannibal, even for a moment, was terrifying, as though the man would disappear off the face of the planet the moment he left Will’s sight.

Hannibal's eyes roved over Will’s face as he took in his reluctance, and then, as he understood, a small smile pulled at the corners of his mouth.

“Mylimasis, I-”

“You’ve called me that before,” Will accused, eyes narrowing, “What does it mean?”

The pleased smile dropped off Hannibal’s face, clearly thinking about Will’s violent reaction to his other translation.

“It’s an endearment.”

“What. Does. It. Mean.”

Hannibal paused, rolling the next word carefully around in his mouth.

“Beloved.”

Enraged, Will bit Hannibal on the meat of his inner thigh, a few inches above the knee, something between a moan and a scream trapped in his mouth as he sucked the flesh, tongue sweeping across the torn skin to taste the blood.

Hannibal groaned, hips half lifted in an aborted thrust as his arms strained against their binding.

“Yes, Will. Take what you need, anything you need from me,” Hannibal pleaded, accent thick as his voice cut through the air.

Will keened, lightning striking through him at the words. All he could feel was desire, all he could taste was blood. He felt feral, beastial, like a werewolf growing fangs.

“So beautiful like this, Will,” Hannibal continued, his calf making its way between Will’s legs, giving Will something to roll his hips into other than empty air, “So good for me, my good boy.”

Will whined, high pitched and desperate, the sound torn out of him as he rutted against Hannibal’s leg like a dog, his cock hard and aching in his jeans. Unable to focus on sucking, Will pulled his mouth away with a debauched pop, both men groaning at the sound. Still thrusting, Will laved the hot, wet flat of his tongue across the wound, tasting copper and sweat, before pressing messy, open-mouthed kisses around the bite.

“How do I taste?”

Will moaned at the words, unable to even begin to articulate an answer, too lost in the heat of the moment to have any semblance of coherency. His thrusts grew short and sharp, his fingernails digging into the flesh of Hannibal’s leg.

“That’s it, that’s it,” Hannibal urged, “You can let go, darling. Oh, my *darling boy* .”

Can I call you darlin’?

Shocked as though by lightning, Will scrambled away from Hannibal, chest heaving from fear and arousal as he landed several feet away.

Hannibal was *beautiful.*

Though the blinds were closed, the early morning light still spilled in, illuminating his torn bronze skin, catching all the little cuts and worshiping the blood. His chest heaved, broad and powerful, and though he was tied to the chair he looked as though he was in total control, a lion staring down its prey. His eyes were dark, the pupils blown out, and he looked at Will like Will was the only thing in the universe, the culmination of all his heart’s desires.

Will whimpered and the gaze only turned darker, the gaze of a predator.

Blood dripped from Hannibal’s thigh onto the chair, and his underwear tented obscenely with the shape of his cock, the silk stained from the dripping precum of the head.

“Christ,” Will gasped, his hips giving one deperate thrust into empty air before he forcibly stilled them, “Christ, holy fucking christ.”

“Will,” Hannibal beseeched, equal parts soothing and commanding, “Come back to me.”

“The ticket!” Will blurted, *very* hard and suddenly unable to look anywhere near Hannibal’s direction, “The ticket. I’ll… I’ll be- the study, I’ll… *christ.”*

He whimpered the last word, and, unable to look in the direction of Hannibal’s answering growl, scrambled to his feet, taking off down the hall as if Hannibal was right at his heels.

He knew where the study was from the earlier casing of the house, so he soon stumbled in, panting as though he had just run a marathon.

Savoring the lack of Hannibal's presence in the room, Will gulped down air like a man saved from drowning, willing his fevered skin to chill. After a few moments he was well enough to continue in his quest, and he made his way over to the desk, sitting down heavily in the chair.

Leaning his head back, he closed his eyes and willed his erection to go away, trying to think about anything except for Hannibal. It took awhile, but once he was down to half-mast he started to search through the desk, looking for the ticket.

In the second drawer from the top was a journal, a boarding pass sticking out of it like a bookmark.

Will's breath left him in a rush.

The journal new, only a fourth full, but it was clear that it had only been used after the fall, the pages filled with sketches of Will, on the cliff or sitting at Hannibal's table, in grecian armor or plaid shirts and jeans. The writing, too, was about Will, timelines of where he was and where he would be, excerpts from articles on him painstakingly hand copied, and even pages devoted to recipes that would make him taste the sweetest. Will couldn't read all of it, the writing skipped between languages, and even though Will could make out English, French, and Italian, there were pages written in something that Will could only suppose was Hannibal's native tongue, and even a few lines in what looked like Japanese.

It was not merely a journal, it was a *devotion,* and though it would likely look like the ravings of a madman to anyone else, to Will it looked like a love letter, and he couldn't help but be charmed.

Hannibal hadn't *forgotten* about him, or even abandoned him, he had *obsessed* over him, drawn him, stalked him, and put thought to paper about killing him. For a man who never left any evidence, the journal was damning. Hannibal had risked *everything* simply so that he could talk about Will.

Will couldn't help but smile.

With the journal acting as a balm over Will's jagged edges, he made his way back to the dining room, his grin still sitting wide on his face.

Hannibal remained in his chair, though he did not look quite so debauched, and he looked up sharply when Will entered the room, eyes glinting hopefully as he took in the other man's smile.

"You were going to kill me," Will accused playfully, voice giddy. He couldn't remember ever being this happy in his life.

Hannibal smiled like the sun, his crooked teeth giving a boyish lilt to his grin.

“And you were going to kill me, mylimasis.”

Will giggled, *actually giggled* like a teenage girl asked to go to prom, and Hannibal’s gaze turned even more adoring, his smile spreading even wider.

Smiling as he was, Hannibal almost looked like his old self, the crinkled lines by his eyes imitating the crows feet he would later have.

“You’re so beautiful,” Will complimented, punch drunk on adoration as he approached the other man.

“A compliment most cherished when it comes from you, Adonis,” Hannibal replied.

Will’s face flushed, but he said nothing, pleased and uncomfortable in equal turns by the praise.

“When I saw you in the starlight I thought I was in heaven; Botticelli himself could not capture such an angel.”

“Don’t lay it on too thick,” Will scoffed, kneeling once more to untie Hannibal’s arms.

Hannibal only grinned, eyes bright with adoration.

Once the knots around his wrists had been untied, Hannibal tenderly took Will’s face into his hands, angling the younger man’s head up, so he could look him in the eyes.

“If I saw you everyday forever, Will, I would remember this time.”

Will laughed, tears gathering in his eyes as he laid his hands over Hannibal’s.

“Where does the difference between the past and the future come from?”

“Mine?” Hannibal answered, voice soft and worshipful, “Before you and after you.”

Chapter End Notes

> And.... scene! Only 12 more chapters to go 🥵 How are there still so many chapters???? Whatever. We'll get through it together y'all ;) Hope everyone liked meeting Hannibal! Writing fight scenes is a favorite of mine but hopefully it didn't go on for tooo long. The frottage was kind of a surprise though tbh, I wasn't even planning on putting anything sexual in this chapter, but I just couldn't help myself. Or maybe Will and Hannibal couldn't help themselves 😏
>
> Chapter description is From Eden by Hozier, chapter title is Danse Macabre by Camille Saint-Saens.

Last but not least I would like to say THANK YOU!!! The hits, kudos, and comments (especially the comments) have really been a bright spot in these crazy times, and I always smile like a maniac when AO3 sends me emails about this story!! All the love has been super motivating, and I'm always rushing home from work just so I can start writing more content for y'all! I'm still kind of new to AO3, I was on fanfiction.net for like... way too long, so I'm still kind of learning the ropes, but I'll start trying to reply on the comments; y'all deserve some love back when you're giving so much to me!

Moderation

Chapter Summary

> Want me to love you in moderation, do I look moderate to you?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

An hour later, after they had showered and put on ridiculously expensive pajamas, Will found himself sitting on the bathroom counter, his skin itching uncomfortably as Hannibal pulled a perfect line of stitches into his arm.

“I feel drunk.”

“Is that a good thing or a bad thing?” Hannibal asked, the perfect picture of a psychiatrist.

Will gave a lopsided smirk, thinking back to the office Hannibal had kept in Baltimore, before a zing of betrayal shot through him, good memories turning sour when he remembered burning patient records in the fireplace.

“Can’t I just feel things without having to analyze them?”

“Perhaps,” Hannibal conceded, not looking up from his work, “But it is only through analysis that we can come to truly understand ourselves. Tell me Will, what is it that you wish to understand?”

The question so sounded like one he would hear in Hannibal’s office that Will could practically feel the smooth leather of the patient’s chair against his back. He didn’t answer, not particularly eager to get into philosophizing when his whole body felt like one giant bruise, but simply turned his head toward Hannibal, a soft smile making its way onto his face.

Hannibal looked up at the lack of response, a smile of his own answering when he took in Will’s tender expression.

“What is it?”

Will shrugged as much as he could with Hannibal’s hands still on his arm.

“Just you. I never… I considered so many futures when I woke, but somehow I never considered this.”

Hannibal nodded, turning back to Will’s arm.

“I confess, neither did I. To be with you, without the weight of the FBI on our shoulders… It is not something I had considered in years. It seemed… too sweet.”

“I thought I had died,” Will confessed, turning back to face the wall, the sight of Hannibal almost too much to bear, “when I woke up. I thought for a moment that I was in hell.”

“What convinced you otherwise?” Hannibal asked. Finished with Will’s stitches, he wound a bandage around the arm, fingers delicate to the hurt he had caused.

“My dog was there,” Will explained with a tired laugh, “Penelope’s a good girl, she wouldn’t be in hell.”

“Ah, sweet Penelope; you have named her well. How faithfully she waits for you across the sea.”

“Hm,” Will hummed, studying the patterns in the tile, “Then perhaps you’re Poseiden.”

Hannibal’s soft hands hesitated a moment, the pads of his fingers only barely touching Will’s skin.

“Poseidon was the villain of that tale.”

Will scoffed.

“You haven’t made my journey easy.”

“You spilled no wine in the ocean for me.”

The sentence had a depth of feeling to it that surprised Will, Hannibal’s words quick and bitter, a snarl hiding just behind his lips.

“Spilled no wine?” Will asked, looking over at Hannibal incredulously, “Spilled no wine? Hannibal, I threw *casks* for you.”

The hesitant fingers on Will’s arms lost their hesitancy, wrapping tightly around the bandaged wound, squeezing harshly and threatening to pop stitches.

“In the river of your mind, perhaps, but never in the sea. You knew where I was for *three years* Will, and never once-”

“ *I told you to run-”*

“You *also* told me you would not look for me -*”*

“That was *not* an invitation to get yourself *caught!* Jesus Christ, Hannibal, you *killed Abigail,* I couldn’t just go with you like she didn’t matter-”

“How *lucky* for you then that she is still alive. Would you have gone to her, *mylimasis,* when you had finally killed me?”

As Will had been dedicated to doing exactly that mere hours ago, he was surprised to find himself burning with shame at the accusation, humiliation sloshing in his gut like rotten wine. He couldn't move, couldn't speak, couldn't do anything other than avert his eyes and feel his face burn red, the scarlet of his cheeks staining him guilty surer than any blood on his hands could.

Despite Hannibal's accusation, it seemed he had not truly believed his own words, and Will could practically feel the betrayal and the *hurt* steaming from Hannibal's skin at the realized intention.

"Would you have gone to Molly, too? Would you have-"

"Hannibal, stop-" Will begged.

"-made yourself your own little family? Built the foundations of your house on my grave? Did you make her warm, while you cast me in the darkness? Did you feed her your sunlight, while I fell, with ruined wings, into the sea?"

" *Hannibal-* "

"Tell me, in those years while I was starving, *how did her cunt taste?"*

The question was shocking and vulgar, crude in a way that Hannibal normally considered beneath him. It made Will turn and look at him again, surprise snapping his eyes back to Hannibal's face.

The vulnerability there laid him bare.

To anyone else, Hannibal would have simply looked furious, but to Will, Will who knew him *so well* (one could argue intimately), he looked terrified.

Rage and hurt and jealousy and fear all mingled together into an amalgamation of human emotion, and in this moment Hannibal was *so human* that it scared Will, sent shivers down his spine. How strange it was to see a god brought low.

The words were unlike Hannibal because it was unlike Hannibal to feel jealousy. Jealousy was unlike Hannibal because it was unlike Hannibal to feel love. Love was unlike Hannibal because love requires understanding. Hannibal was not understood until Will had come along. Will had made Hannibal utterly unlike himself. The knowledge was both terrifying and thrilling, and Will's head felt heady with power while his heart beat quick with fear.

"She tasted like treason," Will answered honestly, his words soft and searing in the quiet of the room.

Hannibal's eyes flicked across Will's face, unsure.

"Just as sweet?"

"And just as sinful."

Hannibal had no response, but his hand dropped from Will's arm, no longer threatening to make bloody what once was healed.

Carefully, moving as slowly as he would in a hostage situation, Will slid from the counter to kneel, wincing slightly as the harsh tile pressed against the cuts in his knees. Coquettish and doe-eyed, Will looked up through his lashes at Hannibal, sliding a hand up Hannibal's thigh to tenderly pet the fabric over the bite he had caused. His brain was screaming at him to rage in anger, his mirror neurons begging him to lash out like a wounded animal, but Hannibal didn't need a double, he needed to be soothed.

"Where am I, Hannibal? At Molly's feet, or yours?"

Hannibal didn't answer, a strange and wary glimmer in his eyes.

"When I woke up… I wept for so long I lost count of the hours. All I wanted was to be back in your arms, bound with you on the cliff."

"You were so beautiful then," Hannibal admitted, the words coming out stilted and involuntary, "Even as you tried to kill us."

"I didn't try to kill us," Will confessed, turning to look at Hannibal's pant leg when the eye contact became too much, "I wanted to… to *birth* us. If we could survive the fall then we could survive anything, even a life together."

"You would want that? To… go with me?"

Will nodded before pressing his face against the pant leg, replacing his hand with his forehead.

"I was going to leave Molly, leave Walter, leave everything behind to go with you. I still will, even though it's hardly the same. I can't be apart from you, I can't… survive the separation."

A soft hand found its way to Will's head, Hannibal's fingers gently winding into the curls.

"Would you kill her, if I asked you to?"

Will inhaled sharply, the scent of clean skin, blood, and cotton both soothing and agitating him. He needed no moment to think, however, despite his surprise, he already knew. He had always known.

"Yes. I would hate you for it, but yes."

He said no more, choosing to neither beg for her life or hasten her death, simply allowing himself to simmer in his humiliation, in the knowledge that Hannibal made him into something grotesque. In the knowledge that he had been grotesque already.

Hannibal's fingers wound more tightly, the burn of pulled hair laving at Will's scalp.

"And would you kill Abigail?"

“ *Please,”* Will begged, the word pulled from him like taffy, “No, please, you’ve taken her twice, Hannibal, please, she’s our *daughter.”*

“Our daughter? Were you not going to kill me, make her yours and yours alone?”

“Only when I thought you didn’t know me, only-”

“And yet you would forgive her for her memory, her lack of it, while you-”

“If we had gone back further-”

“Suckled her atop my grave-”

“Would you just LISTEN!”

Hannibal fell silent as Will wrenched his head up, ignoring the pain from the hand in his hair as he stared defiantly into Hannibal’s eyes. Though he was at Hannibal’s feet he felt a sudden surge of power, of command.

“If we had gone back further, would you kill Mischa for me?”

Hannibal let go of Will’s hair, reeling back in shock. It was clear the words were wholly unexpected, and a thousand different microexpressions flicked across Hannibal’s face, surely invisible to anyone but Will.

“I wouldn’t ask you to kill your daughter,” Will stated calmly, almost casually, though his pulse raced quick beneath his skin, “So do not ask me to kill mine.”

Slowly, he rose, his bare feet laying flush with the tile as he stood, almost as tall as Hannibal.

“I’m yours, Hannibal, I’m your man. Don’t make me regret it.”

Will half expected more arguments, but Hannibal simply nodded, the expression on his face closing off to be unreadable.

“It would be best for us to sleep. I suspect we are both running over 24 hours without it.”

“I’m exhausted,” Will agreed.

“The jet lag would tire you even further. Come, I have a guest bedroom.”

As Hannibal approached him Will was sure he would lay a hand on him to guide him, but Hannibal simply brushed past him, walking in quick, measured steps and expecting Will to follow. A surge of… something, disappointment maybe, swelled in Will, but he pushed it down, following Hannibal with eyes already drooped half-closed. He really was tired, exhaustion settling deep in his bones and pulling him down like gravity.

“My room is down the hall, if you need anything,” Hannibal explained when they reached the ridiculously lavish guest room, “Please, do not hesitate to need anything.”

Hannibal's face revealed nothing but a veneer of politeness, but the paint was thin, and Will could see the cracked plaster of his emotions behind the layer of civility. When Will reached to take Hannibal's hand in his own, Hannibal easily surrendered, his face a hesitant composite of hope and shame as he ran a broad thumb along the inside of Will's wrist.

It was strange, but Will could not help but want to soothe the ache of Hannibal's insecurities, to mould himself into a panacea for the hurts that he himself had caused. The codependency weighed heavily on both of their minds, solitary creatures as they were, and Will could sympathize with Hannibal's earlier harshness, how could he not, with his empathy? They were touch-starved, feral children, flailing and biting because they did not know how to kiss. If Will was not forgiving when Hannibal raged, how could he expect Hannibal's forgiveness when Will himself inevitably lashed out?

Though, perhaps that was just the exhaustion talking. Will felt he would forgive Hannibal anything if it meant he could get some sleep.

"I'll always need *you* ," Will confessed, a small smile inhabiting his face as he saw the gentle hope that bloomed on Hannibal's.

"When we wake," Hannibal promised, giving his hand a squeeze before letting go entirely. Will couldn't help but feel relief, he had experienced enough strange new things today without also having to navigate the finer tunings of sharing a bed. Hell, the only cuddling he'd had in months was from Penelope, who usually ended up drooling a puddle the size of the Atlantic Ocean onto his sheets.

"I better get coffee tomorrow," Will teased.

"As many cups as you like," Hannibal responded in kind.

And with that, he left the room, leaving Will to collapse on the giant bed, swallowed almost immediately by sleep.

When Will awoke, it was to a sea of blankets.

A quick gasp and a fluttering pulse were the first indications of consciousness, a feeling of *no no no wrong where am I* permeating his mind before the beams of warm, Italian sunlight escaping through the slit between the curtains reminded him of where he was. Of that same sunlight falling across Hannibal's face in the early morning hours.

When Will awoke in Louisiana he had thought he was in hell, now, as he awoke in Italy, he believed himself in heaven. Hannibal was *here.* Hannibal *remembered.*

There had never been a story sweeter.

Stretching like a cat in a sunbeam, Will gave a satisfied hum as he felt the wounds Hannibal had gifted him, pressed into his skin like flowers in a book.

He felt a little tug of satisfaction, and contemplated staying in bed awhile longer, his limbs as heavy and warm as they would be on a Sunday morning with nothing to do. He felt like honey poured into the mould of a man, but, as much as he would enjoy a lazy morning, he would enjoy having Hannibal in his eyeline even more.

The house smelled promisingly of coffee, even though the clock in Will's room read 4:03 PM, so Will freshened up in the bathroom quickly, impatient for both caffeine and Hannibal. He was, after all, addicted to both.

Though the house seemed almost dreamlike in the afternoon sunlight, the hardwood floor was tangible beneath the soles of Will's feet, a reward for the senses after his dreamless sleep. The house was beautiful, the elegant primal mix that Hannibal was known for, if a little ostentatious, and Will's eyes danced over what he had seen in the moonlight, the walls somehow warmer in the light of day.

His feet led him easily to the kitchen, where Hannibal stood at the stove, already dressed for the day.

Lifting his borrowed pajama shirt slightly, Will pinched himself hard right beneath Hannibal's smile, halfway certain that this was a dream. The scene was so familiar and foriegn at the same time that it seemed to warp right before his eyes. Hannibal cooking was a constant of the universe, Will had seen it dozens of times, but the unfamiliar kitchen picked at Will's eyes like a child would pick at a scab. Hannibal's back was turned to him, but the haircut was wrong, and his profile was leaner.

"You slept for nine hours," Hannibal informed him, turning from the stove to smile at him, "Do you feel rested?"

"Mostly I just feel like I'm hallucinating," Will responded, drinking in Hannibal's smooth skin, his eyes resting on the little scar on his cheekbone, "You look so young."

"I relate to the feeling," Hannibal confessed, voice a little softer as his eyes roved across Will's face, "You have always been beautiful, but there is an ethereal quality about you now."

Will raised a hand to his face, self-consciously touching the scar on his cheek.

"I'm a little more ugly now."

"Not at all," Hannibal reassured, "You fought the dragon and lived, your scar is a mark bestowed upon the highest predator. What did you tell those who noticed, I wonder?"

"Fishing accident," Will replied with a lopsided grin.

"A likely injury for a young southern man," Hannibal conceded, turning back to the stove.

Will could relate to Hannibal's reluctance to look at him, he felt the same. It was overwhelming, the familiar and uncanny look of their younger selves setting off alarm bells

in their brains. Looking at Hannibal was like trying to slide into a bath when the water was too hot, a wanting and a warning tied in one.

“Anything I can do to help?”

“You could chop the vegetables, they all need to be minced.”

Hannibal had already set the vegetables on the cutting board, along with a wicked looking knife. He shot a strange, small smile over his shoulder before turning back to the stove.

Despite Will’s understanding, it still stung that Hannibal would so easily turn his back to him. It was maddening to see him look so put together, slacks pressed and shoes shining, while Will was in pajama pants cuffed twice at the bottom like a little boy. Will wasn’t sure what, precisely, he wanted, but it chafed to see this picture of civility when the night before had been so feral, so raw.

Bypassing the food, Will grabbed the knife, striding quickly across the kitchen before pressing himself against the older man’s back, one arm around Hannibal’s waist, and the other holding the blade of the knife to his throat.

Hannibal stilled.

“I cannot say that I expected this, but you have never ceased to surprise me. Have you decided to finish what you started, Will? Are you going to run along to your Molly now?”

“Fuck you,” Will snarled, suddenly furious. He could not say why he was angry, or even why he had picked up the knife in the first place, but it felt good, righteous.

“An understandable sentiment, though, unless you’d like to season the scallops with blood, I might suggest turning off the stove first.”

“Turn it off then.”

Hannibal did so, his hand lingering on the stove knob a moment before coming to rest atop the hand Will had on his waist.

They stayed still a moment, breath syncing as Will remained pressed against Hannibal. Though they both still wore their clothes, the contact was scorching, almost unbearable. Perhaps they weren’t facing each other, but the position was so reminiscent of the fall that Will could almost feel the rain on his face, the blood on his cheek.

Was this all they were? All they could be? Torturing each other with wives and knives and daughters and death? Embrace after embrace, slice after slice, they twirled around each other like dancers in a music box, chasing after pounds of ill-earned flesh. Will had Hannibal now, had him free from the FBI’s most wanted list, and Hannibal had Will, free from obligations to his wife. They had each other, but to what end? The finish line was sweet as wine once broken, but where does the runner go once the race is done?

After a few moments of simply breathing together, Will broke the silence.

“Say that I go with you this time, or you go with me. What will you take from me?”

“Nothing,” Hannibal answered quickly, accent heavy on his tongue.

Will pushed the knife into the skin of Hannibal’s neck, unable to help his macabre smile when little drops of blood dripped down over his fingers.

“Don’t lie to me, Hannibal. We’re past that, don’t you think? What will you take from me?”

“Everything, anything. Anything you will give me. I will beg like a dog at the table for a single scrap of your regard. I cannot be without you.”

“Will you take my hatred?”

“ *Yes.”*

The word was said with such fervor that Will was struck speechless. After a moment of tense, unbearable silence, Hannibal continued speaking.

“I gave you three years of my life, Will, and I would give you a thousand more if you asked it of me. Direct me as you like; if you want my freedom you have it. If you want my pain I will thank you for every blow, cherish every scar as a priest would stigmata. Carve your vision into my body and I will revere each brushstroke. I will crawl at your feet for the chance to be kicked.”

Releasing a ragged breath, Will pressed himself even closer to Hannibal, the warmth comforting, the power intoxicating. He tilted his head up to murmur his next words into the taller man’s ear.

“Will you take my love?”

Hannibal gave a full body shutter, tilting his head so he could lean it against Will’s.

“I will take it and take it and take it until I am drowned. I will glut myself with it until I am choked. I will paint each wall in my memory palace with it until they drip red with the color of your heart. I will need no food, sleep, wine, or blood; I will gorge myself with your love and be fulfilled. There is nothing I want more, Will. I will take all you can give me.”

“Will you take my indifference?”

The air rushed out of Hannibal as though he had been stabbed, an almost pathetic sound Will had never heard from him before taking up residence in Hannibal’s mouth.

“Do not ask that of me. Anything but that, please.”

The words sounded wrecked and desperate, and Will realized that was the closest he had ever heard Hannibal sound to frightened.

“Then what will you give me, Hannibal? What will you give after you have taken all I have?”

“Everything. Everything in my power. My heart, my life, my word, my worship, my hand. Enough blood to run a river or all my fingers broken, unable to grip a knife. I would give you an apartment in Paris, a mansion in Greece, a cottage in Spain. Boats and open ocean and as many dogs and daughters as you wish for. I would give you a monster when you wish to fight me and a lover when you wish to love me. A world where we are the only gods to pray to, no morals but our own. I would give you a leash to reign me and a knife to cut me free. Mylimasis, I would give you anything.”

“Will you…” Will petered off, suddenly very conscious that he was close to tears, and reveling in the bizarre realization that Hannibal was *rambling* , something Will had never seen him do before. He swallowed hard, gripping the knife tighter.

“Will you give me your indifference?”

A few torturous heartbeats passed. A tear fell from Will’s cheek.

“My cruel, capricious, *darling* boy. I never could. I never will.”

“Then why- why-” Will broke off, trying to swallow around the lump in his throat. A cry ripped from his lips as Hannibal squeezed the hand on his waist.

“Why didn’t you *hold me?”*

“Will?”

“You held me in your kitchen and you held me on the cliff-” the words poured out of him; he could not stop them if he tried, “-but in Italy, with the bonesaw… I couldn’t bear it, Hannibal. You can kill me, you can kill me but you have to hold me. You can’t kill me like I don’t *matter.* You have to hold me, you have to-” he broke off, sobs wracking his body like an unforgiving tide.

Hannibal let him cry, rubbing a soothing thumb over the hand at his waist.

“Never before now have I so understood Orpheus.”

Will laughed, wet and broken.

“Just ask if you can look at me, you pretentious fuck.”

“May I turn, Eurydice?”

Will let go the knife.

The clatter of the blade on the stove was as loud as a gunshot, but neither man paid attention; as quick and fluid as oil on water, Hannibal turned to embrace Will, the position the same as when he had gutted him.

A different kitchen, a different year, a different wound, the same embrace.

“Everything,” Will gasped, clutching onto Hannibal as though he was the only thing keeping Will upright, “Everything, I want everything, Hannibal, I want everything, I want-”

“Of course,” Hannibal promised, his voice sweet like the razor’s edge of broken caramel, “Anything for you, everything for you, Will, my darling Will-”

“I want your mind, I want your heart-”

“You have them already, can you not feel my thoughts in your head?

“God, yes-”

“Can you not feel my heart beating in your chest?”

“ *Hannibal-”*

“You have me, anything you want, I’ve always been yours-”

“We’re the same-”

“Yes-”

“One soul, cleaved in twain-”

“ *Yes*- ”

“I am made from your rib-”

“Oh *darling* -”

“Never leave me-”

“Never, Will, as long as you’ll have me-”

“Stay with me-”

“Forever, mylimasis, net Dievas negalėjo manęs išplėšti iš tavo pusės-”

“You’re *mine* -”

“Visada, I always have been-”

“I’m yours, only yours-”

“Oh Will, *beloved* , say it again, tell me again-”

“Only yours, Hannibal, it’s your name carved on my bones, I’m only yours-”

“ *Will…”*

Overcome with emotion, they both fell silent, holding each other even tighter, as though they could speak through their shared desperate clutch. While Will continued to sob into Hannibal's shoulder, Hannibal buried his face in Will's hair, body curved around him as though to shield Will from everything else in the world.

How long they stood there Will couldn't say, but eventually his sobs subsided, and Hannibal's breath evened out into the calm, even breaths that Will had always so admired.

"Can I still get that coffee?" he murmured into Hannibal's neck, a laugh tripping off his tongue at the bizarre situation.

"Of course," Hannibal replied warmly, the ghost of a laugh breathing through.

Carefully, as though Will was made from porcelain, Hannibal guided Will's head away from his shoulder, bringing both hands up to cradle his face, angling Will so he could look into Hannibal's eyes.

"I meant what I said, Will, anything you want is yours. I want to…" he trailed off slightly, his eyes flitting over the scar from the bonesaw, "I want to take care of you."

"God-" Will rasped, a hot and putrid feeling of shame in his stomach rising up to combat the bone-deep *want,* "Don't say that-"

"Then what do you want, Will? Tell me, tell me your wish and I will grant it."

Hannibal's eyes were too deep, too hungry, flecks of maroon hiding in the amber like preserved bloodstains, just the same as they had always been, despite the youth in his face. Will could do nothing but close his eyes against Hannibal's gaze, a paltry shield for his naked soul.

"I want…" he petered off, the back of his throat choking on non-existent words.

Hannibal waited in silence for a moment, before finally breathing a small, sweet sigh, rubbing his thumbs lightly over Will's eyelids to catch the traitorous tears that clung to his lashes.

"My darling boy… you can't even lie to me, can you?"

Will said nothing, eyes shut tight against how good Hannibal's hands felt. He wanted, oh how he *wanted* , but he had always been the giver, to himself, his father, his dogs, Molly, Walter, Abigail…. There had never been a time when he could *take,* when he could put down his worries and be soothed for a while. Molly had tried to be that for him, somewhat, but she had a child to look after, and he had dutifully stepped into the role of provider.

"Put down your gauntlet, Will, let go your sword. I am here for you, beloved."

"We don't… We don't deserve that, Hannibal," he whispered.

"Deserve? I care nothing of the concept. I care for *you,* Will, only for you. Open your eyes, mon coeur, tell me what you want."

Will would not, *could* not look into Hannibal's eyes if he was to be truthful, and so he kept them squeezed tight as he spoke.

"I want you to take care of me, Hannibal. I shouldn't, but I do."

" *Oh…"*

Hannibal's answering sigh was so sweet and hopeful that Will's eyes opened of their own accord, desperate to see his face. Finally *seeing* Hannibal was almost tantamount to a religious experience, the older man's eyes shining and worshipful, looking at Will as if he were the culmination of all of his dreams, the realization of his deepest desires.

"I'll be so good to you, Will," Hannibal promised, voice rough and ragged with emotion, "How lovely your life will be…. You will want for nothing."

"I'll always want for *you* ," Will answered, embarrassed to find that his voice shook wildly.

It felt dangerous, licentious, to make these promises, but Will couldn't bring himself to stop. Hannibal was the worst sort of monster, Will himself had done monstrous things, it seemed sinful to give into their desires, two unholy beasts curled round each other in the dark, hiding each other from heaven's light, snapping and snarling at angels. It was also, however, Will's deepest, most burning desire.

"You shall always have me, mylimasis. *Always."*

What pretty words sharpened teeth can shape.

Slowly, hesitantly, Will reached his hand up to cradle Hannibal's cheek, sighing softly as Hannibal smiled, his lovely crooked teeth on full display. For a moment, Will wondered what it would be like to kiss him, to meet the plushness of Hannibal's lips with his own, to run his tongue along the canines that had torn the Dragon's neck, along the molars that had chewed the flesh of so many. How would Hannibal taste, Will wondered, like blood? Or would he taste like a man, tangible and *real?* Would he taste like love?

The moment was utterly and completely ruined by Will's stomach, growling loudly to make its displeasure known.

The two men chuckled.

"It's possible I haven't eaten in 24 hours," Will confessed, a blush blooming across his cheeks.

"What a terrible keeper am I," Hannibal lamented with a chuckle, "Only charged with your care a moment ago and you already suffer from hunger."

"I took better care of my dogs," Will responded with a grin, only half joking. After all, he had never framed any of his dogs for murder.

"I shall endeavor to do better," Hannibal promised, a fond smile sitting pleasingly on his face.

Casually, as though this wasn't absolutely turning Will's world upside down, Hannibal placed a gentle kiss over the scar on Will's cheek, then another over the scar on his forehead, lingering a moment before letting go of the other man and stepping back.

"The vegetables will hardly mince themselves, Will."

After getting Will a cup of coffee, Hannibal left the room to dress the cut Will had made, coming back fifteen minutes later with gauze wrapped around his neck. Somehow he made it look elegant, reminiscent of an heiress wearing pearls.

"What are we making?" Will asked when Hannibal returned to the stove, not sure exactly if he should apologize for trying to kill him earlier.

"Cioppino," Hannibal answered, the small, pleased smile he always wore when talking about food lighting up his face, "A seafood tomato stew, created in America by Italian immigrants, fishermen trying to find use for the bycatch in their nets. I should be making you authentic Italian food, but I'm afraid-"

"-you enjoyed the symbolism too much," Will finished with a grin.

"Precisely. As a fisherman in a foreign land, I hope you can appreciate it."

"I'm sure I will. You've done a lot of terrible things to me, Hannibal, but you've never served me a bad meal."

Will said it jokingly, a grin still pulling at his mouth, but Hannibal didn't smile, his face blank and emotionless as he turned toward Will.

"Sorry, bad joke."

"Will, I…" Hannibal adjusted the cuffs of his sleeves, a nervous tick, "I want to be good to you."

All of a sudden, realization hit Will like a freight train running through his chest.

Hannibal wanted to be good to him, ***but he didn't know how.***

In that moment, the entirety of Hannibal Lecter's life stretched out in front of Will like taffy, and he could see the absent parents, the fumbled, childish attempts to take care of Mischa, the silence of the orphanage, sex only used as manipulation, the thousand dinners alone, the human flesh fed to others in a one-sided connection, and then finally *Will* , wanted so desperately but so, so alien.

Hannibal's sister had died in childhood, and after that there had been no one, no friends, no lovers, not even a dog. He had learned to manipulate, this lonesome devil, and so with Will had done the only thing he knew how.

"I'll teach you," Will promised, the depth of sincerity in his voice startling him, "We'll teach each other. We'll be happy."

“Yes,” Hannibal breathed, eyes shining with intensity, “We will.”

As they both turned back toward their cooking, Will couldn’t shake the feeling that they had just given their marriage vows.

Chapter End Notes

Will: *Literally dry humped Hannibal and then asks "Will you take my love" and then gets embarrassed when Hannibal kisses him on the cheek*

We stan one (1) shy horny man

Just some chapter notes, the Lithuanian Hannibal says translates to "Even God could not tear me from your side". Also, Penelope is Odysseus's wife who waits for him to return from his journey, and in the Odyssey Odysseus doesn't pour an offering of wine into the ocean, and so Poseidon fucks up his journey and is generally unhelpful, so you can kinda see why Hannibal's mad to be compared to him. Chapter summary and chapter title both come from the song "Moderation" by Florence + The Machine, it's a fucking banger and a great Hannigraham song, so go give it a listen.

Ok so in my fic outline this chapter was supposed to cover an entire week and it really only covered like 24 hours before I realized it was already like 5000 words, so I bumped up the chapter count by 1, so I still have 12 more chapters to go 🤯 This one was a lot of talking but next chapter we're gonna have some bedsharing 😉

Thanks again for all the amazing comments and kudoses!! I commented on all the comments on chapter 2 and then realized that MY comments also count towards the comment count that my fic has, and I don't really want to artificially inflate those numbers (do people read things based on how many comments it has???? idk) so I'm only gonna respond to things that require responses, if that makes sense.

Thanks again for reading!!! Hope you have a great day 🥰

Delicate

Chapter Summary

It's not that we're scared, it's just that it's delicate.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

While exhaustion had led him easily to sleep the night before, tonight Will only lasted about two hours in the guest bed before he finally caved. Cheeks stinging red with embarrassment, he slipped off the mattress and padded quietly out of the room. For a moment, he felt like a little boy again, stained carpet underneath his feet as he snuck into his daddy's room, running from nightmares, but he shook it off. As much as Hannibal might call him 'boy', he was a man, and he was confident Hannibal wouldn't reject him.

Probably.

Maybe.

Despite the declarations of love and the… *incident* the night before (and god, he couldn't even think about it without blood rushing to his head and his… head), it still felt forbidden to encroach on Hannibal's space. Somehow, he would be more comfortable punching Hannibal in the face than he would be asking to share a bed with him.

But it was fine, almost certainly fine. Hannibal was in love with him, obsessed with him, would probably be overjoyed at sharing a bed.

Probably.

...probably.

Will made it all the way to Hannibal's door before he wimped out.

This was fine. This was fine! All Will had to do was stare at the closed door until he felt a little less desperate, and then go back to his own bed to have his weird little dreams until morning. Almost certainly, Will would get sweaty and gross and offend Hannibal's delicate sensibilities, or, he would discover that Hannibal did something weird like listen to whale sounds or kick in his sleep. The whole thing would be a disaster, or it would be unbearably awkward, and it would be better for everyone if Will just went back to his room.

Just as Will had made up his mind to turn around and leave, Hannibal opened the door, seemingly not at all surprised to find Will on the other side.

“Were you going to come in, or were you going to stand outside the door all night?”

Will huffed a laugh; of-fucking-course Hannibal knew he was there.

“I don’t know, give me a few more hours to decide.”

“Terrible boy,” Hannibal scolded with a grin, stepping aside and sweeping an arm as if to say ‘After you.’

The room was large, almost the size of Will’s entire apartment, and was painted a deep aubergine, highlighting the California king bed with silky, golden sheets. Artwork tastefully decorated the walls, an antique desk sat coyly by the window, bookshelves and chairs transformed half the room into a miniature library, and a full set of authentic samurai armor guarded the room from the corner. The only light creeped across the room from a lit lamp on the bedside table, the stained glass of the shade throwing the room into a kaleidoscope. It was completely ridiculous and completely gorgeous and completely Hannibal.

The man in question swept past Will to sit on the bed, one foot dangling down to the floor. Hannibal’s pajama pants matched the color of the walls (because of course they did), but he was otherwise unclothed, the vivid splotchy bruises that Will had given him sitting proudly on his skin.

Purple walls, purple bruises; golden bed sheets, golden skin. Will wondered where *he* fit into the rich swirl of colors, if he even fit at all. At the moment, he felt just like the samurai armor, foreign and guarded, an outsider looking in.

“What is it that brings you to my door, Will?” Hannibal asked, breaking the silence only when it was clear that Will would not.

“Couldn’t sleep,” Will answered, a frown taking up residence in the corners of his mouth, “Why are you up?”

“The same,” Hannibal replied, “I normally sleep on my back. Thank you for picking the glass out, by the way.”

Will nodded, a flush creeping up his cheeks at the memory of the mangled flesh beneath his hands. He felt a strong desire to approach Hannibal, wrap his arms around him, dig his fingers into the cuts and *tear*.

“At least it disfigured the brand,” Will offered softly, feet staying firmly in place, “You can’t tell it’s the Vergers’ now.”

“Ah, I had hoped. Perhaps I should thank you then.”

“Don’t,” Will commanded, equally repentant and fierce, “Don’t thank me for hurting you.”

“Oh, my darling,” Hannibal breathed, reaching out toward Will, “Pain is a gift when given by your hand.”

Where the vision of violence had struck Will still, this vision of tenderness bade him move. Without thought, Will was walking toward Hannibal, his own hand stretched out as the Creation of Adam repainted in living flesh.

Their hands slid together easily, merging like rain in the ocean, and Will was surprised at the shear *relief* the touch afforded him, the tightness in his muscles unspooling in Hannibal's proximity. Easily, as though he had done it a thousand times before, he brought his free hand to cradle the back of Hannibal's head, running his fingers through the hair at his nape. More hesitantly, Hannibal brought the hand not holding Will's up to Will's hip, splaying it wide across the bone.

Will loved him.

Slowly, Will stroked at the skin at the base of Hannibal's skull, this place where Cain had murdered Abel. He was painfully conscious that he could snap Hannibal's neck, and painfully conscious that he did not want to. Will's gaze felt heavy, weighted, as though he were Atlas, unable to lift his head. Unlike Atlas, he reveled in his condemnation; it was no burden to look upon Hannibal's face.

"So beautiful, darlin'," he breathed, sliding his hand around to cup Hannibal's cheek, his thumb caressing the sharpness of the bone.

He missed the well-worn lines of Hannibal's face, missed them dearly, but Hannibal in his youth was ethereal, as beautiful as Michael, as sweet as Lucifer.

"Stay with me," Hannibal breathed, only a hair's breadth away from begging as he looked up at Will, enraptured, "Sleep in my bed."

Will laughed, nothing more than a soft huff of breath.

"Who sleeps in the lion cage?"

"The lion tamer."

And Hannibal did truly look like a lion, golden hair falling in his face and strong, corded muscles beneath his skin.

"Have I tamed you then?" Will asked, rubbing his thumb across the crest of Hannibal's cheek.

It was a pointless question, Hannibal would never be tamed.

"Tamed me?" Hannibal asked, his broad hand tightening on Will's hip, "You have changed my very nature."

"I have, haven't I?" Will conceded, the echo of Hannibal's words bouncing against his skull; *Do you believe you could change me, the way I changed you?*

"Come to bed," Hannibal pleaded, fingers making their way beneath Will's pajama shirt, tentative and imploring as they stroked his scar, "Come to bed with me."

Will nodded, relieved that he hadn't been the one to ask.

Reluctantly, the pair withdrew their hands, Hannibal sliding back to lay on the bed while Will walked to the other side, laying down to face Hannibal. They covered themselves in blankets like brides putting on their veils.

It was the simplest thing for Will to reach out, to place his hand on the side of Hannibal's neck, to stroke the bandage. He felt a desire to take it off, to put his lips to the wound and suck like a babe at their mother's breast, as though he could find nourishment from the other man's very blood.

He felt, at the same time, two warring desires welling up in him. The first, to tear Hannibal apart, to drink his blood, eat his flesh, lick at the marrow of his bones. Despite Hannibal's wishes for him, Will had never really felt the call to eat human flesh, but he understood it now, instinctually, in the same way a newborn understands how to cry. The second desire, equally strong, was to never see Hannibal hurt again, to wrap him in soft words and comforts the best that he could, to touch him only as a lover, as a worshiper, to use his hands to hurt him nevermore.

"Hannibal," Will breathed, suddenly close to tears.

Was this what love felt like? Will felt almost as though he would split open, that sunlight and ocean tides would spill through the cracks in his skin. It was easy to imagine: the water filling up the room, green and salted, the bed a boat on rocky waters, Hannibal golden and resplendent in the sunlight, wings of wax and feathers between his shoulder blades. Will had always felt *too much,* had considered it an evil, but now, even as he shook apart beneath the burden, he wished to ask for more.

Will was Ganesha and Hannibal was his feast; he would never have enough.

"I know, Will. I know."

And he did. The talk of conjoining wasn't only pretty words. Will knew, even without the help of his mirror neurons that Hannibal truly felt as he did, perhaps even more acutely, so unused to love as he was.

"I don't…" Will trailed off, fingers shaking against the bandage on Hannibal's neck, "We've been so… *cruel* to each other for so long; I don't… I don't know if I can be tender."

Hannibal's steady hand caught Will's shaking one, bringing Will's fingers to his mouth to kiss, lips soft against the split knuckles.

"You don't have to be, Will," Hannibal spoke, forgiveness in the breath that rippled across Will's hand, "I will take you as you are."

"I know," Will assured, voice rough against the softness of the moment, "but I… I *want* to be."

Hannibal smiled, lips pulled back to reveal lovely, crooked teeth.

“Perhaps that is enough. I can teach you, we’ll teach each other.”

The irony of the words was lost on neither of them, smiles blooming like rosebuds in the corners of their mouths. They had not grown from children to men, but instead had simply twisted within themselves, kindred to the willow tree. How strange that murder had mixed with their blood, sunk itself into their veins, while love had slipped like wind between their fingers, leaving them to grasp at air like wild children, dancing in the wood.

How strange, that out of all their many talents, love was the thing they would find themselves inept at.

“We’ve got a lot to learn,” Will laughed, huffs of honeyed air sweetening his lips.

It should have been a caution, but instead, it felt like a promise, like the beginning of the rest of their lives.

Hannibal smiled wider, his eyes crinkling charmingly as he grinned at Will, practically giddy in comparison to his usual demeanor.

“I look forward to it, Professor Graham.”

Now Will laughed in earnest, delighted when Hannibal started laughing as well.

“Don’t you start, *Doctor Lecter.”*

After a while their laughter died down, the incredulity tinting into fondness.

How strange, that Will loved to look in Hannibal’s eyes.

Slowly, moving as little as he could, Will stripped his pajama shirt off, dropping it over his shoulder as Hannibal’s eyes darkened, pupils dilating as they roved across the newly exposed flesh. It was intoxicating, the feeling of being *beheld,* and Will shifted as his cock started to fill, amazed that simply being the subject of Hannibal’s gaze could arouse him.

“Will you hold me?” he asked, suddenly desperate to feel Hannibal’s skin against his own.

“Yes,” Hannibal breathed, eyes filled with such longing that it pushed against Will’s heart like a physical *ache,* “For as long as you’ll let me.”

“Forever,” Will answered automatically, the word breaching his lips like a charging battalion.

He flushed, nervous as a virgin in his ardency.

“But let’s start with tonight.”

Using the hand that Hannibal was still holding, Will brought Hannibal’s arm to drape across him, turning so that his back was to Hannibal’s chest. It wasn’t a dismissal, but more a vulnerability. Here is the place where my brain meets my body, here are the vertebrae so

easily broken, here I am, thin-skinned and unguarded, eyes turned away as I trust you, begging my neck not to snap.

Hannibal's lips brushed against the base of Will's skull, learning to be tender, learning to be good. Despite the kiss, however, he remained infuriatingly far away, his hand only barely touching Will, the space between them cavernous and haunted.

Will could practically feel the *want* steaming through his pores, and he placed a hand over Hannibal's, the pads of his fingers stroking along the other man's knuckles.

"What's mine is yours," Will whispered, the words clear and concise in the quiet of the room, "My skin is yours. Be no more afraid of it than you are of your own."

"My *darling,"* Hannibal praised, voice warm and effusive as he whispered in Will's ear, "How well you know me."

The phrase held such devotion that Will *ached* to see him, ached to turn around and study the well known planes of his face. Would they be different, dripping sweet with honey? Or perhaps… perhaps he would look at Will the same way he always had, from the moment they first met in Jack Crawford's office.

The thought frightened Will, as starved dogs are frightened of an offered loaf of bread. If Hannibal had loved him all along… the amount of horrors he had enacted on Will could be repeated. But no… no… Hannibal had promised to take care of him.

"Hold me," Will begged, desperate for a moment of tenderness against the onslaught of bad memories.

Hannibal did, and Will's mind went blessedly quiet.

Despite the failed relationships Will had trailed like breadcrumbs through his life, he had never felt anything quite like this. *He* had almost always been the one to hold his partners on the rare occasion he actually cuddled at all, and even when he wasn't, it had always been a woman pressed against his back, small and soft and entirely unfulfilling. Now, those women all seemed paltry in comparison.

Hannibal was broad and firm. He had no breasts to press against Will's back, only hair on his chest, slightly coarse, a steady and welcome reminder that this was a *man.* One strong arm wrapped around Will's chest, holding him both steady and gently against Hannibal, the care of the motion contrasted with the corded muscle that flexed beneath his skin.

They were pressed flush, end to end, and Will could feel everything from Hannibal's collarbones against his shoulders to the tops of his feet pressed against the bottom of Will's. Overwhelmed, Will curled in on himself, but Hannibal followed, his knees resting beneath Will's almost as though Will was sitting on his lap. There was a warmth to Hannibal, and the pulse of his heart against Will's back seemed contradictory to his usual otherworldliness. It seemed as though a stone statue had come to life, warm blood rushing through marble veins. His cock, too, was hard and pulsing, hot at Will's backside like a branding iron. Regardless of his own flesh, however, Hannibal kept his grip on Will, neither rolling away nor pushing his

hips forward, seemingly content to curl his body around Will's as a living, breathing exoskeleton.

"I have nightmares," Will warned pointlessly. After all, his nightmares had taken up about half of their 'conversations.'

"I will be here," Hannibal promised, his lips brushing softly against Will's curls, "I will protect you from all things."

It was a pointless pledge, Hannibal could hardly combat his very dreams, but it comforted Will regardless, the tension in his body sinking into the bed as he rested more heavily in Hannibal's arms. Will had not often felt taken care of, and the feeling was intoxicating.

"Turn off the light, my darling," Hannibal bid, "Let us share sweet dreams together."

Will pulled the chain of the lamp, plunging the kaleidoscope room into darkness.

Will had no dreams.

That in itself would have been strange, but perhaps even stranger was how he woke, well rested and warm. Hannibal was propped up on his side, one hand supporting his head and one hand sliding across Will's skin, fingers tracing the edges of Will's bruises, light enough to cause no pain. Soft, golden sunlight peeked through the curtains, and Will couldn't remember being more content than he was now, in the belly of the beast.

"Good morning," Will greeted with a smile, his voice deep and rasping as he shook off sleep.

"The best," Hannibal agreed, looking smug, "I had plans to show you Italy today, but I am starting to question my decision to let you leave my bed."

"Let me?" Will repeated playfully, one eyebrow raised, "Are you my keeper?"

"Of course," Hannibal replied, flattening his hand to smooth it over Will's abdomen, "As you are mine."

"Good."

"Good?"

"Mm," Will hummed, unable to help his smile, "I do plan to keep you after all."

Hannibal closed his eyes the same way he often did when he savored wine or food, an expression of pure pleasure on his face. Will could sympathise, he felt all the contentment of

a cat in a sunbeam.

They stayed like that for a while, fingers stroking scars and skin as they looked at each other through lidded eyes, as lazy and content as children in summer. Will felt a sense of awe as he explored Hannibal's skin, and he couldn't help but remember Reba, blind eyes wide as she spoke of petting a tiger. He felt the same, though *his* beast was awake, able to bite, and Will wasn't blind anymore.

The urgency that so often fueled their interactions was nowhere to be found, and, though Hannibal had been joking about keeping Will in bed all day, Will didn't think that he would mind. Though Hannibal had often tried to make himself approachable, there had always been a danger to him; before Will had known the truth, he had been afraid that he would corrupt Hannibal, after Will had found out about the psychiatrist's... *hobbies* , Will had been afraid Hannibal would corrupt *him.* Now there was no such fear, and Will traced the scars on Hannibal's arms, ran his fingers through Hannibal's chest hair, caressed the softness of Hannibal's belly, kissed the pads of Hannibal's fingers when he brought them up to stroke Will's lips.

At this, Hannibal leaned forward, and for a moment Will thought that he would replace his fingers with his mouth, but Hannibal went higher, placing a kiss on his hairline.

Will couldn't help but feel both relieved and disappointed.

But then Hannibal kept going.

The kiss to his hairline was followed by a kiss to the scar on his forehead, a kiss to the bridge of his nose, to the scar on his cheek. Will's lips parted as Hannibal neared his mouth, but they were not kissed, instead Hannibal placed an open mouthed kiss to the underside of his jaw, chuckling when Will let out a whine.

Continuing downward, Hannibal sucked even more bruises into Will's neck, along his collarbone, before latching onto a nipple, swirling his tongue and scraping his teeth.

"Fuck," Will practically sobbed, fingers winding their way into Hannibal's hair.

He couldn't remember a woman ever touching him there, couldn't even remember touching there *himself,* but it felt as good as sin, Hannibal's mouth hot and wet against him. As Hannibal smiled against his skin, his hand made its way to Will's other nipple, pinching and caressing it until it was as hard as the one in his mouth.

"God, your *mouth-"*

Hannibal moaned at Will's praise (which Will gleefully filed away) and continued down his body, mouthing at his bruises, nipping at his ribs.

"Hannibal…. Hannibal…. It's just you, darlin', just you-"

The words were half hysterical, but Hannibal seemed to like them, groaning low in his throat as Will babbled. The sounds Hannibal was making did nothing to help Will's hard straining

cock, and Will let out a whine as he rolled his hips into empty air, panting like a dog as Hannibal licked a long stripe across the scar on his abdomen.

“It’s yours… It’s yours, honey, I’m yours-”

“Again,” Hannibal rasped, his lips brushing against the scar as he spoke, “Tell me again.”

Looking every inch the predator, Hannibal was crouched low over Will’s body like a lion with its prey, pupils wide and teeth sharp as he gazed at Will with wild devotion.

“I’m yours,” Will repeated, half delirious as he looked into Hannibal’s maroon-flecked eyes, “Forever. Be mine, Hannibal, say you’ll-”

“ *Always,”* Hannibal vowed, “Will, mylimasis, beloved, caro, mon coeur-”

The stream of endearments was pressed into Will’s skin as Hannibal kissed along the scar, a hand coming up to stroke Will’s cock through his tented pants.

Hissing at the sudden contact, Will rolled his hips against Hannibal’s hand, practically sobbing at the rush of pleasure that surged through him. It was glorious, it was divine, it was suddenly *too much.*

“I can’t, I can’t, I’m sorry, please stop-”

Instantly, Hannibal was off him, a brief moment of devastation flashing on his face before he hid behind a carefully constructed mask.

“My apologies, I projected my desires onto you. I should have asked, especially with your propensity for mirroring. I will not-”

“Dont. Don’t do that,” Will begged, face flushed with shame and anger *,* “Don’t you *ever* use my mirroring as an excuse to say I don’t know what I want.”

Cracks in the mask. Ocean water spilling through.

“Then what *do* you want, Will?”

“You. You, I want you. I want you to hold me, love me, fuck me even-”

A full body shudder rippled through Hannibal.

“-but I just…. Everything is happening so fast! I was *literally* trying to *murder* you 48 hours ago. Hell, I was fuckin’ *married* two months ago.”

As soon as Will said it, he knew it was the wrong thing to say. What little emotion was on Hannibal’s face disappeared at the mention of Molly, his eyes turning cold and hurt, a frozen dead thing in the snow.

“Don’t fuckin’… *christ,* do not fuckin’ do that, Hannibal. You do *not* get to shut down on me right now.”

A soft laugh burst its way through Hannibal's lips, incredulity peaking through his face as he smoothed a hand over the sheets.

"I forget how well you know me."

"I do," Will said, looking down at Hannibal's hand as he covered it with his own, "I know you. I *want* you. I just… I don't know, I'm sorry, I'm fucked up, I just… I always feel too much and this sounds really stupid but I don't want to be *overwhelmed* our first time, I want to be *present* and I'm sorry I'm so fucked up, and I know that sounds stupid, it *is* stupid, nevermind, don't listen to me, just keep touching me, Hannibal, fuck me-"

Tearstained and embarrassed and still half-hard, Will crawled into Hannibal's lap, rolling his hips into Hannibal's as he buried his face in Hannibal's shoulder, eyes closed tight in an effort to dry them.

Hannibal gripped Will's hips, stilling them as best he could.

"Will, stop. Stop."

Will stopped, burning bright with shame.

"I'm sorry."

"Oh, darling," Hannibal lamented, bringing a hand up to pet Will's curls.

They stayed that way awhile, Hannibal gently rocking Will back and forth (which was *embarrassing* because he wasn't a *child* but it *did* feel good so he wasn't going to complain), and once Will stopped crying (and *god* there was no way Hannibal was ever going to touch his dick again) Hannibal gently brought Will's head away from his shoulder, cupping his cheeks so he could wipe Will's tears with his thumbs.

"I meant what I said last night Will, I will take all you can give me. If you cannot give me this it is no matter, I am fulfilled simply by the sight of you. Even now, here, in my bed, in my arms… It is more than I ever dared to hope for."

"But you want to have sex," Will argued, focusing on Hannibal's left cheekbone so he wouldn't have to look in his eyes.

"I do. I also want to kill you and eat your heart out of your chest."

That got Will to actually look at Hannibal, whose lips were quirked up into a grin.

" *However* , I think you'll find I am not ruled by my impulses."

Will snorted.

"You're such a liar, you're the most impulsive person I've ever met."

Hannibal chuckled.

“Perhaps, but not in this. You are teaching me to take care of you, yes?”

Still sniffing a little, Will rolled his eyes.

“Apparently I’m pretty bad at that.”

“That’s why I’m taking over.”

“Historically you’ve also been pretty bad at that. Shit, I’m sorry-” Will corrected when Hannibal’s face went expressionless again, “We were having a moment, I shouldn’t have-”

“By God or some other mystery of the universe we have been given a second chance; I do not take that lightly. I cannot say I regret what I have done, as it has brought us here, to each other, but I have no wish to hurt you again.”

“You would if I left you.”

Slowly, tenderly, Hannibal moved his hands from Will’s cheeks to his neck, the thumbs that had just wiped away Will’s tears now pressing into his carotid arteries.

“Do you mean to leave me, my dear?”

“Never,” Will promised with a wicked grin, “And I’ll kill *you* if you ever try. You’re *mine.”*

“Terrible boy,” Hannibal praised, his answering smile bone-chillingly beautiful, “Of course I am.”

Achingly slow, he took the pressure off Will’s veins, eyes watching hungrily as the blood rushed back to Will’s brain, making him dizzy and lightheaded.

“Rest,” Hannibal implored, lovingly tracing an artery, “Let me take care of you. I’ll bring you breakfast in bed.”

Will smiled.

“And then?”

“And then, mylimasis,” Hannibal continued with a grin, “I’ll show you Florence. Properly, this time.”

Chapter End Notes

ok I know all I do is roast Will in my comments but honey... respect your own boundaries, stop grinding and crying at the same time. Also I know I wrote it but I love how he's like "Hannibal my skin is yours" and then 8 hours later he goes "EXCEPT for my no-no square." Get it together baby.

Hope y'all liked this one! Nipple play and mental breakdowns, what's not to love?? I sneakily extended the story's chapters AGAIN so now we're at 17. I play too much. There is no need to write 5000 words about 10 hours, 8 of which they're SLEEPING, but hopefully it was worth reading anyway. Next up, making sexually charged eye contact at restaurants and being horrifically pretentious in museums.

Chapter title and summary is the title and lyrics of Damien Rice's "Delicate." Also, I realized that I never credited the first two chapter's titles, so I'll do that now! Chapter 1 is Old Time Feeling (Like Before) by Turnpike Troubadours, and chapter 2 is a shortened version of Desperados Waiting for a Train by Jerry Jeff Walker. Delicate and Old Time Feeling (Like Before) are both great Hannigraham songs, and Desperados Waiting for a Train was a huge inspiration for me when I was writing about Will's relationship with his dad.

Also, I'm funkyfreshfemme on Tumblr if ya wanna give me a follow or shoot me a message. None of my irl friends are into Hannibal so feel free to message me with questions/comments about my fic, your fic, or Hannibal in general. Or anything really.

AS ALWAYS THANK YOU!!!! When I went to post this chapter I saw I had 400 kudos on only 4 chapters!!! That's amazing!! I can't even begin to say how much I appreciate each kudos and comment. This is kind of embarrassing but whenever I see an email from ao3 with a comment in it I close the door to my office so my boss can't see me and I do a stupid little happy dance. Or if I'm at home I read them out loud to my cat. Quarantine has really made my life exciting huh 😂 but anyway, thanks y'all ❤

Ne Me Quitte Pas

Chapter Summary

> Let me become
> The shadow of your shadow
> The shadow of your hand
> The shadow of your dog
> Don't leave me
> Don't leave me
> Don't leave me
> Don't leave me

Chapter Notes

> Just a heads up, there's some vomiting and animal death in this chapter. I don't believe either is very graphic, but I'm also the one writing weird gay erotic horror, so lmk if you think I need to add additional warnings or anything.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Could I… could I make a call?”

The question, asked over warm eggs and hot coffee, landed like icicles in the bed.

Hannibal, who had been loose and happy since he had made the overly complicated omelettes, tensed, his eyes narrowing almost imperceptibly.

Will’s scars throbbed.

“Of course, I have a phone in the living room that should be serviceable. Will you take your coffee there?”

“Can’t I use the phone on your desk?” Will asked, voice edged with irritation.

He supposed that imprisoning Hannibal for three years and then throwing him off a cliff weren’t exactly actions that would inspire confidence, but it still grated on Will that he would hesitate to trust him. Hadn’t he killed with him? Shared his bed? Flew halfway around the world to murder him?

Actually, now that Will thought about it, a concerning amount of his actions had revolved around trying to kill Hannibal. Perhaps the paranoia was perfectly warranted.

In fact, Will was so caught up in remembering the many, many times he had tried to kill or imprison Hannibal that he almost missed the other man's words.

"Of course, I'll take my breakfast in the dining room to give you privacy. I would ask that you-"

"Hannibal."

The simple utterance of the man's name rendered him silent, jaw clenching and unclenching as he clearly longed to speak.

"Darlin…" Will beseeched, moving to drape his body over his lover's, trying to make himself soft against Hannibal's marble flesh.

The stone moved easily, Hannibal clinging to Will like a babe about to be torn from its mother.

Will really, *really* didn't want to tell Hannibal about his father, was terrified that Billy Graham would end up as just another Abigail in their war for each other's affections, but if he wanted Hannibal to trust him, he would have to trust Hannibal too. He meant what he said when he promised forever, and he could hardly keep his father and his… whatever Hannibal was, completely separate.

Besides, Billy Graham was damn good with a shotgun and a right hook, it would be a pretty even fight if it came to that.

And Will would positively *murder* Hannibal if he so much as laid a finger on his dad. There was that, too.

"You can listen to as many phone calls as you want, honey," Will promised, "I'm done with secrets, we're not doing that this time."

It was probably not a great idea to give a homicidal cannibal who historically had used peoples' secrets against them unlimited access to *his* secrets, but hey, Will had done stupider shit. Probably.

"Forgive me, darling," Hannibal said, his tone a strange brew of fond and bitter, "But your capacity for cruelty is stunning. You have a history of betrayals."

"A history, not a future," Will countered, bringing one of Hannibal's arms up to kiss the scar on his forearm, "God, aren't you tired of all this? I'm tired. I'm fuckin' *exhausted,* Hannibal. I want… I don't know what the fuck we had in the begining, but I know I want the feeling back. I want you in my corner, honey, not fighting against me. We're literally the only people who know what an iPhone is-" Will grinned when a laugh startled out of Hannibal, "-We need to be a team."

"Patroclus and Achielles," Hannibal mused, the remnants of a smile still on his face.

“Bonnie and Clyde,” Will agreed.

“And who would I be?” Hannibal asked, a single, well-manicured eyebrow raised.

“Bonnie, obviously,” Will mocked lovingly, “Out of the two of us you’re the most fashionable. *If* you can call the amount of paisley you wear fashionable.”

Hannibal’s eyes took on a calculating look, but it only flashed for a moment before he covered it with a mischievous grin.

“You would buy all your clothes at a supermarket if you could.”

Will opened his mouth to refute it, but soon closed it as he realized that he did, indeed, buy most of his clothes from Walmart.

A little note of triumph shone bright on Hannibal’s face for a moment, but quickly faded away.

“Make your call, darling.”

As Will stood up and made his way to the desk, he sort of wished that he had taken Hannibal up on his offer to leave, as talking on the phone while someone stared at you intently was not, exactly, the most comfortable way to talk on the phone. However, anything that convinced Hannibal he wasn’t somehow contacting the police was the right thing to do in Will’s book. But still. Awkward.

Of course, Hannibal had a goddamn gold-plated rotary phone that probably cost more than a month of Will’s rent, but that made Will feel a little better about the exorbitant amount of money that he was about to charge to Hannibal’s phone bill by placing an international call.

He put in the number following the international code, and listened to it ring, and ring, and ring, and ring, until a *click:*

“Billy Graham ‘ere. If I owe ya money ya can fuck right off. Elsewise leave a message afta’ da beep.”

Beeeeeeep.

“Hey, daddy,” Will drawled into the phone, flushing pink as he steadfastly looked anywhere but Hannibal, “It’s Junior. Just callin’ to tell you not to pick me up tomorra; I’m gonna stay in Florence a little while longer. I’ll call you back when I book another flight.”

He thought about adding a quick ‘love you’ to the message, but ultimately decided against it, setting the phone down with a click.

“I, uh… I missed my flight about an hour ago,” Will confessed, a hand coming up to rub the back of his neck.

When Will finally looked back at him, Hannibal looked as though Christmas had just come early.

“Junior,” Hannibal repeated, one eyebrow raised as he fought to keep a grin off his face.

Will glared.

“Really? That’s what you’re going with?”

“Apologizes, darling,” Hannibal said, not really sounding sorry *at all,* “I find myself in a particularly good mood.”

“And why would that be?” Will asked with a grin, putting a bit of a saunter into his walk as he made his way back to the bed.

“I’ve just learned I’m to have a houseguest.”

“That sounds terrible.”

“Not at all,” Hannibal praised, hands settling on Will’s hips as he came within reach, “He’s a fickle thing, but I find him to be the loveliest creature on earth.”

Will flushed, pleased and embarrassed, as he placed his hands on Hannibal’s shoulders, half considering climbing into Hannibal’s lap.

“You’re a terrible flirt, Hannibal,” Will teased.

Hannibal’s grin was wicked.

“And you’re a darling boy, Junior.”

“Oh, fuck you!” Will laughed, pushing him backward.

Hannibal bounced a little on the bed before propping himself up on his elbows, smiling up at Will like a lovesick fool.

Will wanted desperately to kiss him.

“I’m going to go take a shower,” he said instead, cheeks still flushed pink, overwhelmed and turned on and thoroughly flustered, “Do you have anything else I can- Shit, I should probably go get my suitcase, I only paid through last night.”

“You look much better in my things, mylimasis,” Hannibal purred.

“MmmHmm,” Will hummed, cocking an eyebrow as he put his arms akimbo.

Another strange, calculating look entered Hannibal’s eyes, gone in a flash as he nodded, a small, pleased smile occupying his mouth.

“Perhaps a bath instead, I can get your luggage as you soak.”

Will’s other eyebrow climbed to meet its twin at the top of his forehead. The fact that Hannibal was suggesting leaving Will at home did not bode well. Hannibal loose in the city of Florence was not a particularly comforting thought.

“Did we not just say we’re done with secrets?” Will scolded, a note of well-deserved apprehension in his voice.

“I believe it was *you* who made such a promise-”

“ *Hannibal-”*

“Just a *little* secret, darling,” Hannibal cooed, slowly rising to his feet to embrace Will, “One revealed tomorrow.”

He stroked Will’s hair, gently bringing Will’s head to rest at the crook of his shoulder. Will’s hands remained on his own waist, unwilling to give in so easily.

“Am I not your paddle?”

“ *Christ-”*

“Shh, shh, mažiau. Am I not your keeper? Do I not care for you, Will? Don’t you want me to take care of you? Let me give you my aegis, sweet boy.”

The words, cooed so softly into Will’s ear, nearly broke him. On the one hand, Hannibal had verbally confirmed Will’s suspicion that he was up to something, and an ‘up to something Hannibal’ usually meant that someone ended up dead. On the other hand, Will desperately wanted to just not give a shit. Hannibal’s manipulation, blatant as it was, sounded like exactly what he wanted; to be cared for, to rest his worries on Hannibal’s shoulders and let him take the burden.

Reluctantly, Will wound his arms around Hannibal’s waist.

“Will there be any blood?”

Hannibal chuckled, the sound both comforting and sinister.

“Not unless you wish for it.”

“ *Hannibal-”*

“No, Will, there will be no blood.”

“Promise?”

The word tasted rotten on Will’s lips, pushed out of his mouth like molded bread. He could not help but think of Hannibal’s broken, *beautiful* heart in the center of the Norman Chapel, standing as a sacrifice made just for him. That had been a promise too, in a way. A bloody one.

‘Promise,’ a small, starved part of him begged, *‘Promise that there will be blood. That you’ll paint the town with it. That you’ll come home and paint me with it too.’*

“Of course,” Hannibal soothed, running a hand along Will’s neck as one would calm a frightened horse, “Not a single drop.”

“Okay.”

Will’s own acceptance came to him from far away, as though the words had dropped from someone else’s lips. He sounded vaguely disappointed, though in who or what, he couldn’t say.

Hannibal pressed a loving kiss on his close cropped curls, squeezing him tighter before letting him go entirely.

“A bath,” Hannibal repeated, giving a sharp nod as though it were himself he was convincing.

Will allowed himself to be led to the master bathroom, which did boast a frankly impressive tub. The guest bath had been nice, but nothing could compare to the marble clawfoot bathtub that stood, proud as a lion, in the ensuite. It was easily big enough to fit two people, and Will couldn’t help but give a small groan at the thought of being engulfed in the warm water.

Hannibal looked toward him at the sound, an eyebrow raised.

“Hey, you’re the one who beat the shit out of me,” Will defended, “Excuse me for wanting to soak my bruises.”

“That reminds me,” Hannibal said as he turned on the tap, “Let me get you something for your arm.”

After rummaging through the bathroom cupboards, Hannibal pulled out something that Will could only assume was medical plastic wrap and neatly wound it around Will’s upper arm, covering the stitches.

“I feel like leftovers,” Will commented dryly, pulse fluttering at Hannibal’s touch, clinical though it was.

Hannibal didn’t respond, but bit the air by Will’s arm playfully, his teeth making a satisfying click as they came back together.

Will burst out laughing.

He couldn’t help himself, the bizarre action was the cherry on top of the bizarre situation, of their bizarre relationship, and Will’s bizarre life. Suddenly he was belly laughing as he hadn’t since he was a child, each look at Hannibal sending him reeling off again, tears gathering in his eyes, as he practically ran out of breath.

And then suddenly Hannibal was laughing too. Deep, peeling rings of joy that Will had never imagined to hear from the formal, tight-laced Doctor Lecter, which somehow made the whole situation even funnier.

Will couldn’t ever remember feeling this good.

Eventually, their laughter came to an end, and Hannibal reached over to turn off the water, pouring some sort of bath salt that filled the room with cardamom and mint.

“What hotel were you staying at?”

Will told him.

“That’s not far, I should be back shortly,” Hannibal promised, moving toward the doorway

“Don’t go.”

The words spilled from Will’s mouth like a waterfall, as warm as the water in the tub.

Slowly, tenderly, Hannibal walked back toward Will, bringing a hand to his nape and tilting their heads together, forehead to forehead. He inhaled deeply as he closed his eyes, and Will knew without asking that Hannibal was encoding this moment into his memory palace, the moment Will asked him to stay.

A breath, then two, then finally Hannibal pulled away, pressing a kiss to the bonesaw scar as he went.

“Only a moment, mylimasis. You will wait for me?”

Will nodded, cheeks flushed at the childish anxiety he felt with the separation.

Hannibal nodded back, short and curt like a military man, and then stepped from the room.

Though Will knew he should get in the bath, he stood, staring at himself in the mirror, for a long, long time. Finally he strode out of the room and all the way to the front door, clad only in his pajama pants and plastic wrap.

The front door was unlocked, as Will suspected it would be, and the little table beside the door proudly presented Will’s service weapon, his wallet, and the keys to what Will presumed to be Hannibal’s car. The wallet, upon inspection, contained quite a few more bills than Will had left it with, roughly translating to the tune of a couple thousand US dollars.

Will felt a ridiculous urge to open the door and throw the money out on the street. Instead, he opened the drawer on the table and put his gun and wallet into it. If Hannibal was going to play stupid games, so was he.

He thought back to only a few hours prior, when Hannibal’s hands had pressed so sweetly against his neck, how he had made him promise never to leave. Will rolled his eyes and went to go get in the tub.

The water was still warm when Hannibal got back, and Will was quite content to lounge in the bath as he heard something shatter in the kitchen. Then another something.

It would be fine. Probably. Hannibal was too fastidious to not check the bathroom before going on a murder spree.

Soon Will heard the click of Hannibal's dress shoes on the bathroom tile, angry and quick until they came to a sudden stop.

"Play games with me and I'll play games with you, Hannibal," Will threatened, not even opening his eyes, "Though I'd rather we didn't play games at all."

His eyes flew open rather quickly when Hannibal grabbed him by the shoulders and shoved him under the water.

One time, when Will had been in elementary school, he had fallen off his father's fishing boat and almost drowned; he had remembered thinking it was beautiful, the way the sunlight had dappled the water, and he hadn't fought as he'd sank deeper and deeper into the lake.

He'd been almost disappointed when his father dove in to save him.

He fought now, clawed and kicked, and didn't stop until Hannibal pulled him back to air.

"Shh, shh, I have you now. I have you now, Will, you're safe," Hannibal lulled, thumping Will's back with one hand and tenderly cradling his face with the other.

Will heaved bathwater and bile over his submerged body, clinging desperately to Hannibal as he did so.

It was embarrassing, how much he trusted Hannibal to heal when he was so often the reason Will needed healing.

"My sweet boy," Hannibal lamented as Will recovered from the drowning, petting his hair as he did so, "My darling Will."

Will sobbed and thrashed, noticing with both guilt and satisfaction that his desperate scrabbling had reopened the cut on Hannibal's neck.

There was something so soothing in the reminder that the Devil could bleed.

After the worst of Will's writhing had ended, Hannibal pulled the plug on the bath and started the shower, using the movable head to gently wash Will's own vomit off of him, as sweet as he had been when he shoved the feeding tube down Will's throat. Though Will grew hard from the tenderness of Hannibal's hands, the doctor did nothing more but clean him, only touching his cock with soaped slick fingers to wash off the bile.

Will stayed silent as Hannibal praised him, words in English and Lithuanian that washed over him like the shower water. Will's eyes wept tears as Hannibal's neck wept blood.

After, when Hannibal's neck had been hastily bandaged and Will had been dried and carefully dressed in more of Hannibal's pajamas, Will broke out of his stupor to speak, his voice rough from his retching.

"I'm going back to Louisiana."

Hannibal, who had been kneeling to cuff Will's pant legs, stilled as a cat does before the pounce.

"You're going to buy me a ticket, and I'm going to call my dad, and I'm going back on the 11th."

"...Will-"

"Shut up. Shut the fuck up. You said you would give me anything Hannibal-"

" *Yes* , Will-"

"Then give me your *fuckin'* obedience."

Hannibal's jaw clicked shut.

From where he was, kneeling and looking up at Will, Hannibal looked almost tame.

Will didn't buy that shit for a second.

"You are going to sit there, and fuckin' *listen* to me, because I am *not* going to say this shit twice."

Hannibal blinked up at Will, silent in his compliance.

"We can't do this," Will confessed, "We just can't. We can hurt each other, or we can take care of each other, but I… *we...* can't handle both. So, you're going to show me Florence, and we're going to be *good* to each other, and then you're going to put me on a plane. Then, after we've both had time to think, *you're* going to get on a plane. If you've canceled your ticket to New Orleans get another one. I'll pick you up at the airport, kiss you square on the fuckin' mouth-"

Hannibal shuttered but stayed silent, only the softest of whimpers leaving his lips.

"-and either kill you or spend the rest of my fuckin' life with you. We can decide in the car. Capiche?"

Hannibal nodded gravely.

"Will, I apologize for-"

"Don't give me that shit, Hannibal, you're not sorry for what you did, you're sorry that you have consequences. You enjoyed it."

Hannibal swallowed; weighed his words.

"Yes. I did."

"Right," Will answered, pissed off and pissed off that he was pissed off, "I'm going to go to the guest bedroom, and read a book, and try not to have a mental breakdown. You can come

and get me when dinner's ready."

"It's barely noon-"

"I said. After. Dinner's. Ready."

Hannibal blinked; weighed his words again.

"Yes, dear."

Will left him kneeling on the bathroom tile.

God, he loved that bastard.

Though Hannibal was almost obsessive about his 8 pm dinnertime, the knock on Will's door happened at 7.

Will sighed. It wasn't like he was really reading anyway.

"Come in."

"I thought you might like to know that dinner is in the oven. It should be ready in an hour."

Will raised an eyebrow and half considered picking another fight, but put his book down and held his arms open.

"I missed you too, honey."

Hannibal wasted no time, quickly crossing the room and climbing into the bed, toeing his shoes off as he went, scuffing the expensive Italian leather.

He held Will as though the very universe was trying to take him away.

They were silent for a moment, and Will could hardly help but think of the Harlow monkeys, how tightly they clung to their terrycloth mothers. How tightly Will was clinging to a man so similar; the outside warm and soft, the inside hollow.

“My parents gave me a dog when Mischa was born,” Hannibal said after a moment, the half-whispered words sounding like a confession, “I loved my sister so dearly they thought it to be unnatural. I would stay awake at night to watch her as she slept, would scream and beat my fists when they tried to take her from me.”

“How old were you?”

“Eight. I had always been a solemn boy, untaken by the strong emotions most children show. The intensity of my ardor for her scared my parents, and the servants. I would attack the nannys when they would try to touch her. ...The gardener’s bitch had puppies only a day after my Mischa was born; they gave me a pup as soon as it could be weaned from its mother. They thought to redirect my attentions.”

Will shuddered, could feel the dark pits of Hannibal’s eyes on him like naked skin feels the bite of winter wind.

“You killed it.”

Hannibal tightened his grip.

“Yes. My father locked the two of us in my room for the night. At first, the dog enjoyed my attentions, but soon scratched at the door-”

“Weaned too soon, looking for its mother.”

“Likely. I was distraught that it would not stay in my arms. I normally care not for the affections of animals, but ripped from my sister as I was…. I only wanted to hold it, to pet it. I remember thinking it was the softest thing I had ever felt….”

His right hand, almost unconsciously, stroked through Will’s hair.

“I had seen the gamekeeper break the necks of rabbits on the grounds. My first kill was quick, efficient. I cleaned it, when it soiled itself, with an old sock and water from the glass on my nightstand. I held it all night like most would a teddy bear.”

Will thought of the teddy bear he himself had as a child, imagined crushing it to his chest and feeling bones break, imagined the patches it bore falling off to reveal raw meat inside.

“By the morning it had started to smell, likely not to anyone else, but with my nose…”

“...What did you do?”

“I brought it down to breakfast, placed it on the table, and asked my parents if I could please have another.”

The image was almost comical, but Will didn’t feel like laughing.

“That’s when you knew you were different.”

“Yes. No. I had always known I was strange, but it wasn’t until that moment that I realized the extent. My parents, the staff… everyone was horrified, but Mischa smiled when she saw me, reached toward me.”

“What did your parents do?”

“My father beat me, quite badly, but my mother… she practically made me my sister’s nursemaid.”

“Oh?”

Will hadn’t been expecting that.

“Yes. She told me once, years later, that there was no better protector than a monster.”

“I’ve always felt safe with you, perhaps not *from* you, but… with you.”

“I confess I’ve felt the same with you.”

“We love, and we kill what we love.”

Hannibal huffed a laugh, his breath warm and sugared on Will’s face.

“Better the devil you know.”

A slow smile bloomed across Will’s lips: he didn’t want it, but it was there regardless.

“I once told Alana that I didn’t see the best in you.”

“Oh?” Hannibal raised an eyebrow, “Is that still true?”

“Yes. I’ve always seen the worst in you, and I’ve always wanted it.”

Hannibal closed his eyes against the emotion the statement evoked, tilting his head forward to brush their noses together.

“We’re going to be good to each other,” he told Will, accent heavy and breath sweet.

“Yes,” Will promised as he clung to his monster, “We will be.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for sharing, Hannibal! What a perfectly normal childhood you had.

I was trying to make this chapter disturbing and sweet and also sad? So hopefully I landed somewhere in the middle of all that.
As always, I'm OBSESSED with your kudos and ESPECIALLY your comments.

Special shoutout to Danysedai for your comment on chapter 4, I literally named this chapter based on your song rec! And rickannigan, I literally wrote Hannibal's little "yes dear" after Will tells him he might kill him based on your comment on the last chapter, so good 😂

Soooooooo y'all may or may not have noticed the chapters going from 17 down to 10, never fear! I just ended up writing way more than I thought. This chapter and the last 2 chapters and the next 4 chapters were never even supposed to exist. Originally I was planning on doing just 3 big stories, Before Hannibal (the show not the dude), During Hannibal, and After Hannibal, but I think it will flow better if I cut it down into smaller chunks. After all, it's a lot of ground to cover and there will definitely be some time jumps (especially after they get settled into domesticity) so I think each chunk of time getting its own story will just work better. I'm just so inspired by all your amazing support that I keep coming up with new scenes, I would rather expand the story like this than rigidly stick to my original chapter outline.

I know I promised it last time and didn't follow through, but next time will DEFINITELY involve ACTUALLY seeing Florence. I even went on tripadvisor to find cute places for them to go lol.

My Medea

Chapter Summary

No haven for this heart
No shelter for the child in mazes lost
Heaven keep us apart
A curse for every mile of ocean crossed

Chapter Notes

From this chapter onward, I'm going to italicize AND underline anything spoken in a language that is NOT English that the character understands. No having to scroll all the way to the bottom of a chapter just to find the translations of what people are saying. If the character can understand it, YOU can understand it, however, if it's a language that the character doesn't speak, it will appear as a foreign language in the chapter. I'll still probably have a few common words or endearments in foreign languages though, just for the ~vibes~ but you won't have to run entire conversations through google translate. More importantly, I won't have to run entire conversations through google translate, it's a win-win.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The secret, which Will had forgotten about until the doorbell rang the next morning, was both better and worse than Will had expected it to be.

As Will looked toward Hannibal over their morning coffee, he was chagrined to find that Hannibal possessed the very particular countenance of someone who knew they were going to get yelled at, and was quite looking forward to it.

“I’m not going to like this,” Will lamented.

Hannibal, looking as content as a cat who had just knocked over a very expensive vase, went to go and answer the door.

Will followed with the same enthusiasm as a dog being led to its kennel.

“Oh no,” Will bemoaned when two impeccably dressed men entered the house holding boxes and garment bags.

The two men, looking quite concerned at the state of both Hannibal's and Will's beaten faces, nervously followed Hannibal to the guest bedroom, coming back empty-handed before accepting a generous tip and quickly scuttling out the door.

"You're a nightmare," Will accused.

"I'm *your* nightmare," Hannibal replied, looking smug.

Will hid his grin behind his coffee cup, but there was no fooling Hannibal, who looked positively delighted that Will wasn't putting up more of a fight.

"Go and get ready, *darling,"* he purred, "And do tell me if something doesn't fit, it will have to be tailored before your flight."

"I've never gotten anything tailored before," Will protested, "I hardly need to start now."

Hannibal raised a well-manicured eyebrow.

"I thought we agreed I'd take care of you, mažiau."

"Well *I'm* taking care of *you* by telling you not to waste your money on me."

"Don't be uncouth, dear. Money is hardly an object, and nothing spent on you could ever be wasted."

"Money *is* an object, and I'm not here to be your… your… *sugar baby,"* Will stammered, cheeks flushing bright red at his own suggestion.

Hannibal smirked at Will's discomfort, his grin only widening as the color in Will's face deepened.

"Will, I'm going to give you access to all my accounts."

"Do *not* do that," Will very quickly protested.

"Then it's settled. If you were here to be my *sugar baby-"* and *god,* those words sounded filthy on Hannibal's lips, "-then you would have eagerly accepted access. As you have not, it is very clear you *are* not. Now go get changed, you wicked boy."

"And if I don't?"

"Then I shall assume you do not like your new clothes, and will be forced to buy you more."

Will glared.

"They'll only get more expensive, darling," Hannibal promised, taking Will's coffee cup out of his hands.

Will glared some more.

"I'm going to buy you diamond cufflinks-"

“Don’t you dare,” Will threatened.

Hannibal made a face that somehow conveyed that he really would dare.

“Oh my god, fine!” Will capitulated, throwing his hands up in the air, turning on his heel before stalking to his room.

The boxes and bags, which were at first overwhelming, turned out to not actually be that bad. Of course, the clothing was all far too expensive, but the cashmere and leather formed themselves into sensible shoes and one-toned sweaters. The button-downs and suits, which Will had assumed would be something akin to the patterned nightmares Hannibal himself wore, were much more aligned with something Will would have picked for himself: dark browns, greens, and blues, the most adventurous of patterns a sensible, small pinstripe.

Will flushed as he noticed a small box of boxer briefs, but those, too, were sensible, if a little form fitting.

After getting dressed, Will was both pleased and a little embarrassed to find that he looked better than he ever had, even with his scars and the fresh cuts that littered his face and hands. Somehow, Hannibal’s estimate of his measurements had been almost spot on, and the brown cashmere sweater under his tweed suit made him look like a more attractive version of himself when he was a professor.

Hannibal had even ordered tortoise-shell glasses, and the bastard had somehow known not to make them prescription.

Though his father’s voice bounced around in the back of his head (“Don’ eva trust a man in a suit dat ain’t at a funeral or a weddin’), and though he wished his hair was a little longer, Will strode out to meet Hannibal, who was, of course, already impeccably dressed.

Something primal in Will purred at the dark, possessive look that shadowed Hannibal’s face.

“The most fair-faced of angels could never compare to-”

“Lay it on too thick and I’ll buy *you* clothes when you come to Louisiana.”

“An interesting proposition.”

“Oh yeah, tons of flannel and overalls.”

The mental image was actually pretty hilarious, but Hannibal’s displeased face was what made Will let out a laugh.

“Cowboy boots and starched jeans all *covered* in dog hair, or-”

“If you’re *quite* done,” Hannibal sniffed, “I believe it would be best to get to the museum before the crowds do.”

“I like museums,” Will stated pointlessly, delighted by the smile that was fighting its way to the corners of Hannibal’s mouth.

“Most do. A museum can reveal many things about a person’s soul, both in the exhibits we linger on, and the ones which make us quickly walk away,” Hannibal said, scooping his car keys off the side table and opening the door, “Tell me, Will-”

“Nope,” Will interrupted, popping the ‘p’, “We’re not doing philosophy before noon. I’m making that rule.”

“Oh?” Hannibal asked, the corner of his mouth turning up in amusement as they walked toward the car.

“We’ve gotta survive the next few days somehow- oh, thanks-” Hannibal opened the passenger door for him, ever the gentleman, and Will waited until Hannibal settled in the driver’s seat to start again, “-we wouldn’t be remiss enforcing a few rules.”

“Is that what we’re doing?” Hannibal asked tightly as he began to drive, “Surviving each other?”

“For now,” Will replied, moving a hand to rest on Hannibal’s thigh. The muscle tensed under his hand, as though expecting pain, and smoothed out once it was clear there was none coming. “We’ll get to living with each other, *for* each other, eventually. It will take time.”

“Do you train your dogs with such a patient hand?”

Will huffed a laugh, could feel the scabs on his face stretching as his eyes crinkled. It was a pleasant kind of ache.

“Something like that. You’ve always been harder to bring to heel.”

“Is that where you want me? At your heels?”

“Is that where *you* want *me?* ”

“I have always been a glutton, I want you in every way imaginable. I am caught between desiring a master and a slave.”

“I feel the same,” Will confessed, “I want to love you, and I want to hate you, and I often find myself feeling exactly the opposite of what I want to feel in the moment.”

Hannibal’s breath stuttered. They could both hear the underlying ‘I love you’ in the statement. Will let it pass by like the scenery out the window.

“Whatever it is we have between us,” he continued, “I want to make it work. Maybe you’ll kill me before I get on the plane, maybe we’ll fight to the death once you get to Louisiana, I don’t know. But my cards are on the table, I’m not gonna strike the first blow.”

Hannibal said nothing, but took one hand off the wheel to hold the hand Will had put on his thigh, intertwining their fingers.

They were silent the rest of the way.

“A natural history museum?”

They were walking up the stairs to the Museo di Storia Naturale together, so close their fingers brushed, and Hannibal looked toward Will with an accusatory eyebrow raised as they approached the door.

“*You’ve been studying Italian*.”

Will flushed, glad for the unseasonably sharp breeze to explain his pink cheeks.

“ *Only a little ,”* he replied, the foreign words clumsy but understandable.

Hannibal smiled his Mona Lisa smile, pride shining in his eyes.

“Fuck off,” Will grumbled, cheeks still pink as he opened the door before Hannibal could get it.

Though the lady at the ticket booth looked quite concerned at the state of their faces, Hannibal managed to procure two tickets, and then they were off, Hannibal’s hand at the small of Will’s back as he guided him through the museum.

“A little macabre, don’t you think?” Will asked with a smile as they passed a wing that looked to be entirely exhibiting taxidermy.

“The same could be said about both of us,” Hannibal replied good naturedly, “Ah, here we are.”

Will was utterly, *devotedly,* in love with Hannibal.

“I love bugs.”

When Will had lived in DC, he had visited the insect exhibit at the Smithsonian at least once a month. Among the pinned butterflies and artfully displayed beetles, he could almost capture a sense of peace so absent from the bustling city. As a child, he played with rollie pollies, as a teenager he had made some money one hot Texas summer by extracting giant water bugs from pools, as a college student he had written papers on maggots and body decomposition, as an adult he had sat with his dogs and watched moths flick around the porch light.

Will *loved* bugs, but that was only another thing that made him off-putting, so the love was confined to academic papers and relocating spiders outside when his girlfriends had wanted him to stomp on them.

“I *love* bugs,” he said again, and it sounded almost like *I love you* .

“I thought you might,” Hannibal replied, and it sounded almost like *I love you too.*

Will caught the hand at Hannibal’s side and squeezed it, the most he would dare in public, giving him a smile before letting go and moving to the glass.

“These are beautifully pinned; you know the Acherontia atropos can actually chirp? They expel air so quickly it vibrates the epipharynx, almost like an accordion.”

“How terrible,” Hannibal replied, his tone of voice changing it to be ‘ *how wonderful’,* “I rather like the design on its thorax.”

Will grinned, the corners of his mouth pulling wide.

“Of course you would. The common name is Death’s-Head Hawkmoth, they’re considered ill omens because of the human skull pattern. This one’s from Africa, but the other two subspecies are only found in Asia. Though, that’s probably what it says on the plaque, sorry.”

“I should hardly care to read the descriptions when I have you here,” Hannibal said, indulgence saturating his voice, “I’m rather looking forward to having my own tour guide.”

“You’ll regret that,” Will replied, trying to go for coy and instead landing on self conscious, “I’m kind of… a lot.”

It was a pointless statement, Hannibal knew him better than anyone, but Will couldn’t help but shrink into himself, shoulders hunched, wrinkling his new, expensive suit.

“I could never regret you,” Hannibal confessed, the words quiet in the wide, lofty room, “Besides, I myself am… excessive.”

Surprised, Will found his eyes flicking toward Hannibal. He knew without asking that it pained the other man to admit any fault in himself.

Will didn’t reply, but stood a little straighter as they moved onto the next case.

“Cosmia trapezina. One of the most common moths in America. When we lived in Colorado I used to catch them and put them in the spiderwebs by the gate.”

“You did the spider’s work for him.”

Again Will looked at Hannibal, his gaze nebulous.

“I kept the spider fed.”

True to his word, Hannibal listened patiently as Will lectured on all his favorite insects, asking interesting questions and adding polite interjections to prove that he was engaged. To be completely honest, it was the most fun Will had had in a long, long time.

He told Hannibal so, as they walked out of the hall to look at the other exhibits, and steadfastly avoided looking at the other man's pleased face. It was the same sort of face Penelope made when she brought back a ball and plopped it at Will's feet.

They grasped hands quickly as they moved past a large group of Japanese tourists, then let go once more. Italy in the 1990's was hardly the place for that sort of thing.

As a good-natured revenge for Will's bug lecture, Hannibal poked fun at the outdated medical exhibition, explaining future medical technology lowly in Will's ear. The other museum goers gave them a wide berth, giving wary glances at their beaten faces and expensive suits, so the two time travelers could talk without being heard.

"They think we're mafioso," Hannibal murmured, breath warm on the shell of Will's ear.

"We're worse," Will replied, shooting a smile over his shoulder.

On the way out of the exhibit, the pair passed the Japanese group again, this time drifting apart as it became apparent the tourists couldn't communicate with the woman at the front desk.

"I'll see you in the creepy dead animal exhibit," Will bid, knowing that Hannibal could hardly pass up the opportunity to plume his feathers and show off his language skills.

Hannibal nodded, already speaking rapid Japanese as he reached the commotion.

As strange as two men beat to shit walking through a museum was, Will soon discovered that only *one* scarred and beaten man gave off an even more unsettling aura.

As he walked through the taxidermy section of the museum, stopping to look at stuffed finches and a rather life-like kookaburra, other tourists quickly distanced themselves from him, a little field trip of schoolchildren going so far as to leave the room when he entered, the children pointing and whispering as the teacher shepherded them out. Will meandered aimlessly until he reached a room filled entirely with deer, his breath leaving him as antlers seemed to close in from every angle.

He had enjoyed hunting, once. Now he felt haunted by every deer he had ever hunted; the taxidermy eyes looking so like the eyes of brown-haired girls.

Will had told Hannibal once he felt responsible for everyone Hannibal had ever killed. He felt the same for Garett Jacob Hobbs.

Hannibal found him that way, some indeterminate amount of time later, and Will felt relief at the heat he could feel from Hannibal's body when he sat close to him on the bench, the heat of something alive.

“Do you miss her?” Will asked, and for a moment, he wasn’t sure he wanted the answer. For a moment, he wanted the whole world to disappear in a swirl of color and death, for his own body to expand to fill the universe, for the only other life to be Abigail, safe and sweet in the cradle of his stomach.

Hannibal took his hand, entwining their fingers so their knuckles formed a scabbed and bloody rosary.

“Every day.”

Will was thankful for the emptiness of the room when he started to cry.

Hannibal kept Will’s hand in his own as they cried together, half-dried tears leaking out of their eyes like last night’s rain drips from tree leaves in the morning. They had cried for her so many times.

“I loved and hated Abigail in equal measure,” Hannibal said softly as the salt stung their wounds, “No... love and hate. Past tense is hardly accurate.”

Will stayed silent, thinking about the smile on his abdomen. He had seen Hannibal pull open the cut on his neck that morning, preventing an easy heal so it would scar. It would be a match to Abigail’s, though she would never receive one in this life.

“Often, I find that I regret killing her,” Hannibal continued, “one of the very few things in my life I truly regret. However, I think I would equally regret letting her live. I find it almost… painful, to share your affections.”

“You want to own and own completely.”

“Yes,” Hannibal admitted, shame absent from his voice, “I could not for you or Abigail while the other still lived, you cared for each other too deeply. I tried to curb my desires, and then you betrayed me.”

“You had to choose.”

“Yes.”

“You should have chosen her.”

“Will you?”

Will swallowed, the rock in the back of his throat scrapped his esophagus going down, settling in his stomach as though it belonged.

“I don’t know.”

They sat in silence a moment, the stale museum air pressing against their skin.

“I want her,” Will finally confessed, his whispered words loud in the silence, “and I want you. And I want… I want my dad.”

Hannibal looked over in surprise at Will's mention of his father, but Will stared ahead at their reflections on the glass.

The way they were sitting… it looked as though Hannibal had antlers.

"What else do you want?" The reflection asked.

"I want you all to want me, and I want it all to work out somehow. ...I don't know how."

The two stayed silent for a moment, Will focused on their reflections as Hannibal focused on Will. Finally, the older man spoke.

"Abigail had a good life, up until the moment that she didn't. It would be no great cruelty to let her be until we are certain of our desires. I… I miss her too. I did not expect to care for her so strongly. However, the resentment she carried for her father may easily transfer to us if we take her now. We will be kidnappers, not saviors, if we took her before Garrett Jacob Hobbs shows his true colors."

"So what, wait until the Minnesota Shrike starts killing? That's over a decade from now."

"A decade full of very important brain development. Unless you believe that nature fully triumphs over nurture, it is impossible for her to be the Abigail we remember unless she lives that same life. I will bow to you in this, if you want her now we can take the next plane, but *my* desire is to first see her bleeding out on the Hobbs' floor. I would have her wake from her coma to us fully prepared to be her fathers, united as we were not before."

The words stung, but there was also a relief to them that Will was helpless to deny.

"Are you saying this because you believe it, or because you want me to yourself?"

"Both," Hannibal answered, so unabashed that Will couldn't help but turn and look at him.

He could detect no deception in Hannibal's maroon-flecked eyes.

A decade seemed too long a time to wait, but Hannibal was right, she had had a good life before the end, and they could always change their mind.

"A decade, huh? You really think we could make it?"

The words alone were dangerous, but Will couldn't help his mouth pulling into a smile.

"I don't know," Hannibal admitted, giving Will's hand a squeeze, "but I think we can try."

Chapter End Notes

I know some people were hoping to see Abigail soon, but Hannibal has other plans. How are you supposed to bang your hot boyfriend and murder people with a toddler

around??? Hope y'all liked the chapter even though it was a little short. Title and summary are from 'My Medea' by Vienna Teng.
The Museo di Storia Naturale is a real museum in Florence that has tons of pinned creepy crawlys and an actual room of taxidermized deer. I've never been, but the pictures on Trip Advisor sure make it look nice.
So how bout it? Think they're gonna make it ten years? I've definitely got some twists and turns for them, it won't all be museums and tailored underwear 😈

Crack Baby

Chapter Summary

> Crack baby you don't know what you want
> But you know that you had it once
> And you know that you want it back

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Perhaps Will didn't have much experience with Italy, but he thought he could find his way to Uffizi gallery in his sleep. The museum seemed to pulse like a heartbeat in the middle of the city, oozing memories of betrayal in place of blood.

He wasn't so sure he wanted to go when he recognized the cobblestones beneath his feet.

"Hannibal," Will breathed, his hand going to the cuff of the other man's sleeve, "I don't… I don't know-"

Hannibal twitched his arm, catching Will's hand when it dislodged from his jacket.

"Hannibal-" Will protested again, eyes flying across the other pedestrians, muscles tensing as his hand burned hot in Hannibal's grasp.

Quick and sly as a fox, Hannibal took a sharp turn, never changing the pace of his steps as he used his body to crowd Will into an alleyway.

It smelled faintly of trash and piss, but the shade of the alley was a balm on Will's fevered skin. His shoulder ached and *ached* and his eyes flicked to the rooftops, looking for Chiyoh.

"Look at me, darling," Hannibal cooed, his hand soothing down Will's neck as a farmer soothes a foal, his thumb pressing a little too firmly on his jugular vein.

"You're taking my pulse?" Will asked, the words halfway between questioning and accusing.

"I think you may be having a panic attack," Hannibal explained calmly, abandoning Will's racing pulse point to wrap his hand firmly around the back of his neck.

Relieved of the responsibility of supporting his own head, Will tipped forward, burying his forehead in the crook of Hannibal's neck.

"I didn't want to hurt you," he begged, pressing closer. Surely Chiyoh wouldn't shoot him if he stood so close to Hannibal; surely Hannibal wouldn't hurt him if he confessed.

“I didn’t want to hurt you, but you had Bedelia, you replaced me so easily and I couldn’t let you go-”

“Hush, Will, I’m not angry with you-”

“We were so happy, I was so happy to see you-”

“Oh, darling-”

“I wanted you to be happy forever, happy because of me, not because of *her-”*

“ *Will-”*

“You didn’t want… I had to- you didn’t want to be caged, I wanted you to die in the sunlight, *in the sunlight,* Hannibal, but I didn’t want to kill you, not really. Don’t hurt me, please-” his fingers clenched the other man’s suit jacket so tightly his knuckles ached, “-please don’t-”

“There was a young lady whose nose, Was so long that it reached to her toes; So she hired an old lady, Whose conduct was steady, To carry that wonderful nose.”

...What?

As Will turned over Hannibal’s words in mind, his breathing slowly evened out, his grip loosening as his pulse steadied.

“Better?” Hannibal asked after several long minutes, one hand gripping his wrist loosely, his thumb monitoring the radial artery.

Will huffed, lifting his head to look at Hannibal’s too-young face.

“Am I getting crazier, or did you recite poetry?”

“Edward Lear,” Hannibal explained, the corner of his mouth ticked up into a smile, “A limerick from The Book of Nonsense. Panic attacks thrive in rumination; an out of the ordinary occurrence is often enough to draw a patient away from the recesses of their mind. A shock to the system, if you will.”

“I’m not your patient.”

“No,” Hannibal agreed, a glimmer in his eye, “We are simply having conversations.”

Will laughed weakly.

“Is that what the kids are calling it these days?”

Hannibal grinned indulgently.

“You’ll have to tell me, you’re a kid these days.”

“Jesus, don’t remind me,” Will huffed, scrubbing a hand along his face.

“Many would give unimaginable things to be young again.”

“Youth,” Will scoffed, “Take it or leave it. I’m just…”

Hannibal’s face looked so young, scarred up and *wrong*.

“... glad I have you. Though I miss you, if that makes any sense. Not that you aren’t-”

Even in the dankness of the alley, Hannibal was so-

“-beautiful. But I miss you.”

Hannibal nodded solemnly, a hint of relief in his eyes.

“I know exactly what you mean. It is… an indulgence, to see you flush with life, but I confess I…” His hand cupped Will’s cheek, thumb sweeping over where crow’s feet had once taken residence, “I miss the lines of your face.”

“Lines? *I’m* not the one who had wrinkles,” Will mocked playfully, peeling into laughter at the utterly offended expression Hannibal wore.

The older man recovered quickly, moving his hand from Will’s cheek to flick his earlobe.

“Horrible boy.”

“Old man,” Will countered, laughing again when Hannibal shot him a look, “But a *handsome* old man. You’re too vain, darlin’.”

As penance for the insult, Will tilted his head to press his lips at the curve of Hannibal’s jaw, parted just enough to sweep his tongue along the freshly shaven skin.

“It ceases to be vanity when it is truth,” Hannibal murmured, voice a little too breathy to be playful.

A quick burst of laughter from the street tore the two men apart, jumping back from each other in time to see a gaggle of young girls pass by the alleyway, too caught up in being young and carefree to notice the men standing only a few yards away.

“Come on,” Will beckoned, maintaining a respectable and totally heterosexual distance, “We better get to the gallery before the smell of this dumpster seeps into our clothes.”

Hannibal hummed, the corners of his mouth turning imperceptibly down.

“Perhaps just home. I will be able to look my fill in our week apart.”

“I’m fine,” Will shot back, words a little too biting to be casual, “I don’t need to be hurried home like a child having a tantrum.”

For a moment, Hannibal looked at Will with an entirely unreadable expression on his face, then he nodded, a mere dip of his chin, and walked with Will out of the alleyway, back into

the light.

As they walked through the city streets, Will wondered when he would be able to decipher the blankness of Hannibal's face; he wondered if he would be happy if he could.

Despite the panic attack that had plagued Will only a half hour before, a balm of peace soaked into Will's skin as he breached the gallery doors. It had been the leaving that had hurt him before, not the gallery itself. The wide, golden arches of the ceiling and the dark green gardens out the window clashed beautifully with the deep red of the barrier ropes and the stark white of the information plaques.

Everything was neat and proper and in its place; everything was beautiful. Will could see why Hannibal liked it so much.

"Are these the halls of your memory palace?" Will asked, voice quiet amongst the marble as they strolled between sculptures.

"A few," Hannibal answered, eyes soft as they slid from stone to Will, "I spent many days here when I lived in Florence. It offers a gentler kind of beauty than the operating table."

Will hummed in agreement. There was a peace and quiet within the halls of the museum, all patrons clandestinely signing an oath to not speak above a murmur. He imagined it would be a soothing change of pace from the frantic ER.

"There…" Hannibal trailed off, moving closer to Will before speaking, "There is a room I visited many times in my incarceration, when I could not seem to bear the white walls any longer. You look so beautiful there; I did not lie when I said I would remember that time."

Perhaps Will smiled at the words, he couldn't tell. He couldn't focus on anything but the indescribable feeling welling up in him. All of a sudden, he knew he had to speak.
"I think… I think, looking back, that was the moment I realized I loved you."

Only silence followed the words, and Will let his gaze linger on Sleeping Eros, the little marble hand clutching at poppy seeds. Will clutched at pomegranate seeds now, the red juice flowing from his mouth as he ate as many as he could. He was no shy Persephone, he *gorged.*

When his eyes found their way back to Hannibal's face, he was surprised to see the older man was crying, his face just as marble as the exhibits while salted water slipped from his eyes. It reminded Will of the weeping statues, the Virgin Mary crying blood.

" *Oh,"* Will breathed, and reached toward the other man, playing the part of Pygmalion.

How he loved his sculpture.

“Hannibal,” the word left his lips as a bird flies from the nest, “didn’t you know?”

The older man caught his hand and squeezed, the warmth of his flesh heavenly amidst the marble.

“I had suspected,” Hannibal confessed, voice soft and heavily accented, “but I did not know. You love as God does.”

“Great and terrible.”

Hannibal conceded with a dip of his chin. He did not say he loved Will back. He did not need to.

They continued on silently for a great while, and though they let go their hands they were never far from each other, could never keep their eyes away for too long. After all, their bruised and bloody skin made for better artwork than anything the museum could hold.

Of course, when they next spoke, it was passing by one of the many paintings of Madonna and Child.

“Did your hair curl as such?” the devil asked, “I wonder, did your mother hold you with such tenderness?”

Will stayed still, used to many years of thoughtless questions, but the organs within him pulled and pulsed, flinching from the question.

There was no use in snapping, he realized as he turned sharply to look at Hannibal. The man was genuinely curious.

“My mother never held me,” Will answered quietly, revolted by his own shame, “Not even on the day I was born.”

That brought Hannibal to pause, lingering by the painting he had been close to passing by.

“She died when you were born?”

“Worse,” Will confessed, “She lived.”

They spent a moment in benediction before the painting, both lost in thought about their very own Mother Marys. A stilted silence hung softly in the air, something stale but not quite unpleasant settling on the back of Will’s tongue.

“My parents were trendsetters,” Will admitted after a moment, staring resolutely into the Madonna’s eyes, “Got into crack before the epidemic in the eighties.”

He felt rather than saw Hannibal’s eyes cutting toward him, but Will kept his gaze straight forward.

“My mother didn’t realize she was pregnant until I was already six months along; crack has a funny way of preventing weight gain. And by the time she knew she was, well… what’s a few more months of gravel gonna do? The doctors said it was a miracle I wasn’t stillborn.”

“They took you from her.”

Another beat of quiet. Will’s cheeks were so flushed they almost felt sunburned.

“Yes,” he finally confessed, the words tumbling out of him like stones, “It was obvious she was strung out, she could barely talk. I came into this world high as a kite”

“And your father?”

Will laughed, the sound discordant in the otherwise silent gallery.

“Smoked a pipe in the waiting room.”

Hannibal left the statement alone for a moment, as a cat does before the pounce. Finally, he spoke.

“Our earliest years are when our mirror neurons are most pronounced. I would think a lack of contact would wither them, but perhaps your brain overcompensated and carried them into-”

“I know the psychology,” Will snapped, mouth twisted in a bitter line, “You’re not the only one with a degree, Hannibal.”

Expecting a harsh response, he flinched when Hannibal’s broad hand connected with his shoulder, softening when he realized the touch was only meant to comfort.

“Your call in my bedroom-”

“Was to my dad. He really… really turned his life around after the state took custody. Sobered up, took parenting classes, did everything the courts told him to do. Had me back by the time I was three. He’s a drinker, sure, but he never touched drugs again.”

“And your mother? Is she still alive?”

Will tried not to flinch.

“No. When the state told her she could choose crack or me, she chose crack. Died in a flophouse before my first birthday.”

Another moment of silence followed, the only movement in the stagnant room Hannibal’s thumb rubbing the plane of Will’s shoulder.

“Your father… he was dead before.”

The quiet pronouncement forced a shuddering breath. Will wondered if the knowledge would ever cease to hurt.

“Yes, five years from now. It was right after I joined the FBI. He… he wasn’t the best father, when I was a kid. Wasn’t bad but… treated me more like a friend, a little brother maybe. His parents were both pretty bad alcoholics, so he didn’t really have any sort of schema for parenthood, but he did alright. We got closer when I got older, I could… understand is not the right word, I’ve always understood him, but… I could appreciate him more I suppose.”

“How did he die?”

“Hit and run.”

“He won’t die again.”

“No,” Will agreed through clenched teeth, “He won’t.”

Slowly, he turned to face Hannibal. The youth of his lover’s face took him by surprise, as it now always did, but the shrewdness in his eyes did not.

“Hannibal.”

The aforementioned man politely raised an eyebrow.

“My dear?”

Will held in a scoff.

“There are only three people in this world that I love. You, Abigail, and my father. If you do anything, *anything* to my father, I will not only kill you, I will cease to love you. I will scourge you from my heart and never give you a second thought.”

Hannibal’s eyes grew only hungrier, the maroon standing out more than usual against the white of the museum’s walls.

“And yet you loved me even when I killed our child, even when I killed her a second-”

Before he could think, Will’s hands were wrapped tight around Hannibal’s throat, thumbs digging into the arteries.

“Did you enjoy the years I had you caged? Because I will do it again. Touch my father and I’ll take your hands, *look* at him and I’ll take your eyes, take a single *step* toward him and I’ll slice the tendons in your knees-”

A young couple came through the doorway and Will quickly dropped his hands, keeping them dropped even as the two intruders quickly scurried from the room, wide-eyed and pale-faced.

A beat of silence, then two, then finally he sighed. The anger slipped away from him like water.

“My father will die one day and Abigail will grow away from us in time. Don’t make me their burden; don’t drive me from your arms.”

“Beloved,” Hannibal whispered, the stone of his face softening to flesh.

Hannibal raised his strong, broad hands and placed them gingerly against Will’s neck, a loving imitation of Will’s violence. For a moment there was only them, and Will’s lips parted in anticipation. Of course, they were quite rudely interrupted by a trundling security guard, no doubt spurred to action by the couple that had walked in on Will’s half-hearted attempt at murder.

The guard cleared his throat awkwardly, and the lovers slowly untangled, giving him a nod as they left the room.

“Perhaps we should conclude our visit,” Hannibal suggested as soon as they were out of earshot.

“Ridiculous,” Will scoffed, “We haven’t seen Primavera.”

“You don’t care for the works of Botticelli.”

“No, but you do. It would physically hurt, wouldn’t it? To leave without seeing it.”

Hannibal pursed his lips, as though to shield Will from his teeth. Slowly, as the tap of their steps continued through the gallery, the devil’s face smoothed. Once, Will would have only seen a placid lake, but the years of entwinement showed him the ripples beneath the still water.

“My mother was a great lover of art,” Hannibal finally said, knowing that Will would read between the lines.

It was, perhaps, not nearly as detailed a confession as Will’s, but the edges of the words were more ragged; raw.

The urge to ask if she would have appreciated Hannibal’s imitation of the painting sat on the tip of Will’s tongue, but he swallowed it down; the time for barbs and thorns had passed.

They walked quietly until they reached the Botticelli, and sat down on the bench before it without hesitation. It should have been painful, to recreate this history, but instead it just felt… nice.

How long they sat there Will couldn’t say, but they seemed to rise as one, bumping shoulders fondly as they made their way toward the exit.

It seemed a pity to ruin the moment with words, so they didn’t, but they both made sure to smile at the young Inspector Pazzi as they left.

Chapter End Notes

Ahhhh a new chapter!!! We did it y'all! Had a revival and brought back the dead. First of all, I want to say sorry for taking such a long time to update. I'm at the point where I just want to get to the fun stuff (hello google doc with future scenes!) and this part honestly feels like kind of a drag. I may reduce this story by a chapter or two, but just so I can get to the next part faster ;) On top of that I got a new job 🤑 and just signed a lease on a new place 🏠 so I've been pretty busy. Good news is I'm super excited about the next chapter so I'll likely finish that much quicker :)

MAJOR shout out to everyone who commented on this chapter (and to the person who messaged me on tumblr!!). It gave me serious motivation to continue writing. Every time I got a comment I'd be sure to write at least a few lines that day, so y'all really kept it moving, even if my pace was hella slow.

Chapter title and lyrics were from Mitski's song Crack Baby.

Love you guys!! PLEASE stay safe and PLEASE get vaccinated. I work in a hospital and this shit is very very real.

No Weight

Chapter Summary

I wanted you once, but I need you now
Like a bird flying high, in the winter flies south
And these stones that you've thrown, they haven't come close
To turning my eyes, they're just rocks in the road

I carry your heart on my shoulders
And it's no cross to bear
It's no ball and chain
It's no weight
It's so easy

Chapter Notes

Guess who's back
Back again
Hannibal and Will are back
Tell a friend

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He had made these rules. He had made these rules and now he had to follow them. The mantra stuck in the back of Will’s skull like spaghetti on a wall: informative yet unappetizing.

Hannibal, to his credit, seemed to be even more dedicated than Will to following the rules, speaking rapid Italian into the phone as he sorted out Will’s ticket.

Will’s ticket. His plane ticket. The ticket that would take him back to Louisiana. That ticket. The one that he wanted.

The mid-morning sun streamed lazily through the half-opened curtains, glinting off the gold of Hannibal’s stupid rotary phone and causing Will to squint. He sat up to get out of the glare, legs crossed and back against the headboard. Hannibal’s eyes flicked toward him at the movement, then crinkled as he smiled. Will smiled back, lips tasting of melancholy and something like hope.

After another few minutes of rapid Italian, Hannibal placed the phone back in the cradle and sat beside Will, the same bittersweet smile mirrored on his face.

“You leave at noon tomorrow.”

Something sour and sharp pierced Will’s stomach.

“So soon?”

Hannibal’s smile softened.

“Will you miss me, mylimasis?”

“Of course,” Will answered with a scoff, “Don’t be stupid.”

Hannibal huffed a laugh.

“Not something I am often accused of.”

They lapsed into silence for a moment, simply taking in the other’s face.

“I’m scared you won’t be there when I arrive,” Hannibal admitted, turning to look out the window. The golden light of the morning threw his face into a strange relief, highlighting the youth of his skin.

Will reached out to take his hand, rubbing his thumb over the still-split knuckles.

“I’m scared you won’t come, that you’ll never board the plane.”

Hannibal squeezed his hand.

“We’ll just have to promise to meet at the airport then. I expect to see you the moment my plane touches down.”

“I’ll be the one on the tarmac with the safety vest.”

Hannibal smiled again, a soft and delicate thing, his gaze turning back toward will as his eyes flickered to Will’s lips.

For a moment Will thought that Hannibal would kiss him, but then the moment passed, and Hannibal made to stand.

How *dare* he.

Swift as a mongoose, Will caught his snake by the front of his shirt and pulled him back, his other hand coming to cradle Hannibal’s face as he finally, *finally,* kissed him.

Will had kissed before, of course. Molly and Alana and Amanda, and a handful of other girls that shared the same sweet disposition and placid, pitying smiles. Had even kissed a boy once, at the age of fourteen in a tobacco field, all splayed out under the stars. Will had kissed before, but he had never, *never* kissed like this.

Kissing Hannibal was like watching a volcano erupt. The ground shook and the sky turned black, but all you could focus on was the molten lava; spilling and consuming and *burning*. It went beyond warm, beyond hot, Hannibal seared into him like a *brand.* There was nothing but Hannibal, the smoothness of his clean-shaven face, the clench of his strong, broad hands, the *taste* of him; the sweetness of coffee and croissants from breakfast mixed with the coppery tang of blood from his split lip. Will gasped into Hannibal's mouth like he was drowning, his breath and his heartbeat coming in fits, but Hannibal only held him tighter: a buoy in the storm.

"I love you," Will panted when they parted for air, "I love you, Hannibal I-"

"Will," Hannibal rasped, eyes wild in a way that Will had never seen.

For all that Hannibal was playing the part of the anchor, it was truly *he* who seemed unmoored.

"I have you," Will promised, the words as steady as the tide, "I have you."

Wild and blind, like an sightless dog let off its leash, Will clutched Hannibal ever closer, his callused hands grasping desperately for his lover's soft skin.

Broad hands gripped Will tightly as strong arms encircled him, and they sat like that for a long, long while. They did not speak, but it was clear each was committing the moment to mind: Hannibal in a room in his memory palace, Will by the banks of the river. Will could almost feel the spray of the rapids on his face as they held each other on the shore. There was no trickled stream where Hannibal was kept, he lived where the river fed into the ocean, the sea was the only thing large enough to hold him.

Eventually their pulses slowed and breathing calmed, and Will pulled away.

"I should call my father. What time will I land back in Tulsa?"

"11:32 am if there are no delays. You have a layover in New York."

Will nodded and stood, unlacing himself from fingers and bedsheets to make his way to the phone.

As he put in the number he halfway hoped his dad wouldn't pick up again. His father's home in Oklahoma and Hannibal's house in Florence seemed too many worlds away to combine.

His Daddy picked up on the first ring.

"Billy Graham."

"Hey Daddy, it's me."

"Junior! How ya doin'? Got ya a return flight yet?"

Will tried not to huff as he felt an arm wind around his waist and a chin rest on his shoulder. Of course Hannibal would be an insufferable eavesdropper.

“Yeah, should be coming in a little before noon in a couple days. 11:32 am. You want the flight number?”

“Yeah, give me a second ta get a pen.”

Hannibal relayed the flight number to Will as Billy left the phone off the hook, his voice smooth as he murmured in his ear.

Will repeated the string of numbers when his dad came back on the line.

“Got it. Glad yer comin’ back, son. I’s worried ya was gonna stay over there.”

“Nah,” Will replied, giving a squeeze to the hand on his waist, “I couldn’t leave Penelope.”

Billy laughed.

“Oh I’m sure I could deliver ‘er. Ya think one a my boats could cross da Atlantic?”

Will chuckled, delighted when he could feel Hannibal’s smile against his neck.

Of course the Graham boys would both try to sail across an entire ocean just to make a delivery.

“Save the findin’ out for next time.”

“Well ain’t ya a goddamn jetsetter. Next time… when my boy’d get so uppity?”

“Like you didn’t sail me down every river in America before the time I was ten.”

Billy laughed into the receiver, the sound tinny but warm through the phone.

“Guess dat’s true. I’ll see ya in a coupla days Junior. Try not ta miss yer flight.”

“Bye, Daddy,” Will bid, hanging up the shiny gold receiver with a click.

The room seemed too quiet without his dad’s voice in his ear. Italy seemed all at once too foreign without a river out the window or a drawl on the air.

“He sounds like a character,” Hannibal said, his voice warm and familiar as it grounded Will back to reality.

Will snorted.

“Not more so than you.”

“Hm. I have been told on occasion that I’m prone to …peculiarities.”

“On occasion.”

“Rare occasions.”

Will laughed and leaned back, letting Hannibal take some of his weight.

“Have you ever been to New Orleans?”

“No, actually. My time in America was mostly up north, though I did lecture at a few universities in California.”

“I think you’ll like it. It’s a city that thrives on peculiarities.”

“I look forward to it.”

It was exciting, the thought of Hannibal in the closest thing that Will had to a hometown, but also nerve wracking. It was difficult to imagine Hannibal enjoying Will’s tiny apartment and slobbering dog.

“My apartment doesn’t have any golden phones, just so you know.”

Hannibal huffed a laugh.

“I shall be quite content to be wherever you are, golden phone or not.”

Will chuckled nervously.

“We’ll see.”

And they would. Time seemed to stretch out as sweetly as taffy before them, unhunted as they were by the likes of the FBI and Jack. Will was curious to see where it would take them. Almost as curious as he knew Hannibal to be. Curiosity was the doctor’s defining trait after all, perhaps even more than his dietary choices.

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They spent the rest of the day wandering around Florence in a daze, the May sun suspending everything in a golden light. It was a picturesque final day in Italy, but hard to enjoy entirely due to the looming knowledge that it was Will’s last day.

They visited botanical gardens, strolled down cobblestone streets, and idly perused street stalls, enjoying each other’s company more so than the places that they went.

As the sun started setting Hannibal turned their feet toward the direction of a small, out of the way restaurant. Will was glad that he had worn another of the outfits Hannibal gifted him, as the other patrons were clearly several tax brackets above him.

Despite the patrons, the restaurant had a cozy quality to it, bottles of wine lining the walls on dark cherry-wood shelves and small, intimate tables dispersed throughout. It was not as

opulent as Will had expected, but there was a simple elegance to the place; it was nice enough that Hannibal looked at home there, but not so nice that Will stood out.

Their bruised and broken skin alarmed the waitstaff, even as faded and half-healed as it was, but the host clearly recognized Hannibal, doing his best not to let curiosity color his expression.

"*Doctor Lecter, so wonderful to see you. Did you have a reservation?"*

"No," Hannibal answered, a refined regret overlaying his features, "but I had hoped you could squeeze us in. Forgive my English, my companion is American."

Will made something that he hoped passed as a polite smile.

The host passed a cursory eye toward Will but nodded, gathering two menus from the stand.

"We always have room for a man such as yourself, Doctor Lecter," he replied in perfect English.

As he led them through the tables he turned his gaze back toward Will.

"How are you finding Florence, Signore? I hope it's to your liking."

"Well, we got mugged my first night here," Will drawled, pleased when a wry smile touched the corner of Hannibal's mouth, "But even that had an old world charm."

The host's eyes widened, clearly uncertain what to make of Will's joke, but his shoulders lost their stiffness, relieved with Will's easy explanation of their injuries.

"How terrible! I apologize on behalf of the city, and am very sorry that was your first impression of us."

"Wasn't too bad," Will quipped with a shrug, stopping with the host when they reached their table, "At least I had a doctor on hand."

"I was glad to be of service," Hannibal said fondly, pulling out Will's chair for him.

Will sat, and the host did the same for Hannibal's chair.

"Your server will be right out," he told them, "but I will go ahead and put in a bottle of Chianti, on the house."

"That's very kind, thank you."

"Of course, Doctor Lecter, it is the least we could do. After all, there is no better painkiller, eh?"

Hannibal and the host each gave each other a polite chuckle, and then Will and Hannibal were left alone.

The table they were at was near the back, further than the others, which had been squeezed closer together. It was the best table in the restaurant for conversation, and for that, Will was glad. He would have to learn Lithuanian if they wanted to converse privately in public. English was far too well known.

“I suppose a mugging is as good an explanation as any,” Hannibal conceded, the smile still playing at the corner of his mouth, “And I will need an explanation for this.”

Will felt a certain hunger as Hannibal’s fingers ghosted across the bandages on his neck.

“I’ll be glad to see it scar,” Will said, his tongue going to the corner of his mouth to touch the scar that ran across his cheek, “It’ll be nice that I won’t be the only one.”

“You have given me more than this, my dear,” Hannibal reminded, hand coming down to touch his forearm, the scar resting beneath the fabric.

“Easily hidden,” Will scoffed, “I like your new one better.”

“I shall forgo all scarves and high collars,” Hannibal promised with a smile.

Will smiled too, a little giddy with the prospect.

Their waiter came by then, pushing a little cart with their Chianti and two wine glasses. He avoided looking at their bruises and spoke in English, clearly prepped by the host.

“Good evening, Doctor Lecter, Signore…”

“Graham,” Will supplied, unsure that he had ever been to a restaurant nice enough that the waiter would care to know his name.

“Signore Graham. It’s a pleasure to meet any guest of the Doctor. My name is Matteo, and I will be your server for the evening. I would go over our list of wines, but your companion’s knowledge of our vintages rivals any of our employees.”

They all three gave a polite chuckle. It was just the kind of social nicety that made Will kind of want to peel off his own skin.

Matteo got to work opening the wine, seemingly ignorant of Will’s discomfort.

“And how is it that you two came to meet? Do you often travel for work, Signore?”

Will looked to Hannibal for the answer, but the damnable man seemed plenty happy to sit in awkward silence.

“Actually, no. I don’t travel for work. We met in France many years ago, and I haven’t been able to shake the bastard since.”

His words came out a little harsher than he meant them, but the waiter’s look of alarm was quickly soothed by Hannibal’s laugh.

“And yet I am not the one who continues to cross the Atlantic.”

Will rolled his eyes, a smile pulling up the corner of his mouth.

The waiter, clearly a little unnerved by Will’s behavior, kept the conversation to a minimum after that, pouring their wine and leaving to put in their order of appetizers.

Will watched him go thoughtfully.

“What *should* we say when people ask how we met?”

Hannibal took a sip of his wine, considering.

“I confess I’m curious about your trip to France.”

Will shook his head.

“That was stupid of me. It would be better to say that we met in America.”

“I have not yet been. If all had continued undisturbed I would first step foot on American soil two years from now, with an F-1 visa to go to Johns Hopkins. Unfortunately many of my colleagues and acquaintances know this, I have talked often of my desire to go. It would be a lie that toppled under the lightest pressure.”

Will huffed.

“And we’re back to France.”

“Have you truly been?”

Will nodded and took a large gulp of wine.

“Yeah, only for about ten days. I was nineteen.”

Hannibal raised an eyebrow.

“Ah. That paints me in a certain light.”

“You would have been twenty nine.”

“But I was also in Europe at the time. I frequented Paris then, we could have even crossed paths.”

“Early June.”

Hannibal took another sip of wine, thinking for a second.

“No, I would have been in Copenhagen. Pity, I greatly enjoy the picture you painted.”

Will grinned.

“Oh, you would have hated me.”

Hannibal was no mere fish, but he caught the bait quickly anyway, leaning forward in interest.

“How so?”

“I hadn’t developed my… superb conversational skills yet. I likely would have ended up on your dinner table.”

A small “hm hm” interrupted them, revealing the waiter back with their appetizers. Will was surprised to find they were both leaned so far toward each other that they blocked the entirety of the small table.

They leaned back, Will gracelessly and Hannibal with the grace of a king, and chatted with the waiter while he lay everything out.

Well, Hannibal chatted. Will busied himself with his wine.

Despite Hannibal’s easy conversation with the waiter, it was clear he was relieved when Matteo left, leaning forward conspiratorially again.

“So, how would we have met? What is it that you did in France?”

“Hm.”

Will thought for a moment. He had been broke as hell, so mostly had just walked around and smoked cigarettes, with the occasional meal to break the monotony.

“The Louvre would be a likely place for us to meet.”

“Did you truly go?”

“I smuggled myself in,” Will confessed with a sly smile, “I couldn’t afford a ticket, but it was crowded enough that I was able to slip past security. What painting would we meet in front of?”

“Adonis conduit près de Vénus par les amours. Two classical examples of the height of beauty, yet they both paled in your presence.”

Will snorted.

“Did you tell me that?”

“No,” Hannibal replied with a fond smile, “Though I wanted to. I asked you if you were familiar with the story behind it.”

Will hunched over and glared through his lashes at Hannibal.

“Why? Is there gonna be a fuckin’ pop quiz?”

Catching onto the game, Hannibal grinned wider before schooling his expression into one of polite disapproval.

“Not at all, I merely believe the painting is improved when one knows the myth that inspired it.”

“Is art only for the educated then? One could argue a good painting should invoke the same feeling regardless of prior knowledge.”

“The same feeling, yes, but the depth can certainly be affected.”

“Ah, so the poor common philistines have no depth of feeling.”

Hannibal frowned.

“You are deliberately twisting my words.”

“And you are deliberately ruining my experience at the Louvre. Now please excuse me while I stare slack-jawed and stupidly at the other paintings.”

A smile touched Hannibal’s mouth as he broke character, eyes sharp as he watched Will unfold from himself.

Will grinned and popped an olive into his mouth.

“You would have stalked me through the museum.”

Hannibal’s smile sharpened, showing his teeth.

“Would you have noticed?”

Will thought a moment before shaking his head.

“Too many people, I would have been trying to block everything out.”

“I would have made myself known to you later, been at the same restaurant by chance. I would have bribed the host while we were waiting. They would have told you the empty tables were reserved, and I would have offered you a seat at mine.”

“Why would I have taken it? Why not just go somewhere else?”

“I would have offered to pay for your meal as recompense for our earlier encounter.”

Will snorted.

“Yeah, I was poor enough I would have taken you up on it.”

“I was expecting to play with my food, but the more you spoke the more I was enraptured.”

“I was expecting to hate you, but you were too enigmatic. You broke down my walls.”

“And poured many glasses of wine.”

Will laughed.

“That would certainly help.”

“I walked you back to your hotel.”

“Hostel. You would have been appalled at the conditions.”

“Then I would have offered you my guest room. Did you take it?”

Will considered for a moment.

“I think so. I was sharing a room with five other people, it was horrible.”

“Did you sleep in the guest room?”

Will laughed again, thinking about his time in Florence.

“Only the first night, the rest were spent in your bed.”

Hannibal grinned wickedly.

“I thought about tying you to it, keeping you with me.”

“Why didn’t you?”

Hannibal paused, smearing caviar on a cracker as he thought.

“I don’t know. I suppose I was curious. You were an astonishingly bright young man, I wanted to see what you’d do with such an intellect.”

“Why don’t you now?”

Hannibal inhaled deeply through his nose, his face taking on the gaze of a lioness, ready for the hunt.

“Not here.”

He was surely thinking something horrible, something that anyone in their right mind would cringe from, would call grotesque, but all Will could do was shift in his seat, willing the start of his erection to retreat.

Hannibal ran his tongue along his teeth, the movement abated but clearly containing malice.

Will knew he could smell his arousal.

Matteo reappeared then, fully flagging Will’s half-started erection. Aware of Will’s condition (or perhaps simply intolerant of the possibility that Will would order something less than

satisfactory), Hannibal smoothly ordered for both of them, handing back the untouched menus with an ease Will couldn't possibly hope to possess.

"I wasn't expecting you to write me," Hannibal confessed when the waiter had gone.

" *I* was the one who sent the first letter?"

"You were the one who knew my address. I asked after yours but you refused to tell me."

Will grinned.

"Yeah, that sounds like me. I let it go a few months, but I couldn't bear the thought of never speaking to you again."

"You left a return address on your envelope. I'd never been more elated."

"Why didn't we meet again? It's been seven years since we last saw each other."

Hannibal frowned, taking a sip of his wine.

"I don't know, why didn't you visit me?"

Suddenly the conversation was no longer hypothetical. Suddenly the smell of plastic screens and pressed white uniforms filled his nose.

"You would have taken me," Will answered, the honesty almost painful, "I would have left it all behind the moment I saw you. I had a plan for my life and you would have ruined it."

Hannibal nodded, seemingly caught between pleased and distraught.

"I could not come to you, visas and the like, but I could not believe my luck when you showed up at my doorstep."

"I couldn't live without you," Will confessed, "I still can't."

Hannibal grinned, as involuntarily as one so in control of his emotions possibly could.

"Would you stay with me, in Florence?"

"I told you-"

"I know, and I will come to New Orleans and play your good little lapdog. But after I have proved my worth, will you come back with me?"

Will paused to think, taking a large gulp of wine as he pondered the question. He had always thought Hannibal had preferred America, but perhaps he was wrong. He thought of the streets of Florence, bright and romantic, the streets of Paris, dirty yet inviting, the streets of Lithuania, dark but intoxicating.

"I would," he answered, "I will. I came to die with you here; it would be no great shame to live."

Hannibal let out a breath Will didn't even know he was holding, the exhale invisible to anyone who wasn't looking for it.

"I won't take you away," Hannibal promised softly, "Not until we're caught."

"Caught?" Will challenged, a grin curling up the corners of his mouth, "You give Jack that much credit? I won't be helping him this time."

Hannibal chuckled.

"Old Uncle Jack will get there eventually, but it will certainly take much longer without his show pony."

Will scoffed.

"I guess I'm *your* show pony now."

"My partner," Hannibal corrected, "nothing less."

Will took another sip of wine, letting the red sieve between his teeth.

"That's good," he said quietly, "I like that."

Hannibal smiled his Mona Lisa smile, his eyes hopelessly fond.

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They strayed to different topics for the rest of the meal, lovestruck and giggly as they drank an excess of wine and twirled pasta around their forks. It felt like a first date in a way, and if it was it was the most enjoyable that Will had ever had. Despite the horror that Hannibal had wrapped his human veil around, there was something unbelievably comforting in the thought that he had seen every inch of Will's brain, of his soul, and had still come away wanting more.

Hannibal paid the bill (while Will balked at the prices) and soon they were stumbling out into the night. (Well, Will stumbled, Hannibal just walked with slightly more care than he usually did).

"I want to see you drunk," Will confessed as he tripped over a cobblestone, laughing as Hannibal caught his elbow.

Hannibal smiled indulgently.

"Perhaps on… what is it called? The famous street in New Orleans, named after a liquor?"

"Bourbon street?" Will asked incredulously, a full-bellied laugh bursting out of him, "Jesus Christ, yes. I'm gonna get you so drunk on fishbowls you start collectin' beads."

Hannibal raised a quizzical eyebrow, but Will only laughed harder, too full of Chianti and Aglianico and Brunello to elaborate.

Eventually they found their way back to Hannibal's house, the walk and the night air leaving them a little more sober than they had been upon leaving.

Hannibal took the time to hang up his coat in the coat closet, but Will beelined directly for Hannibal's bedroom, collapsing on the bed face-down. The click of Hannibal's shoes followed, and Will could imagine perfectly the fond yet exasperated expression on his face.

"You still need to brush your teeth, my dear."

Will lifted a hand just enough to flip him off. There was absolutely no way he was going to be anything but horizontal for the next eight hours.

Hannibal sighed.

"You at least need to take off your shoes."

Will lifted the other hand to flip him off, face still smushed in the pillow.

"Terrible boy."

A few more steps sounded, and soon Will's leg was bent at the knee, his shoe carefully being removed. He sighed contentedly as Hannibal did the same to the other, the older man's fingers firm but gentle.

The click of Hannibal's shoes soon sounded toward the closet, and, after a few minutes, the soft pad of his feet disappeared to the bathroom.

Will drifted contentedly between sleep and wakefulness, only coming back to consciousness when the sound of the shower water turned off. Suddenly, everything was much too hot, so Will clumsily divested himself of everything but his boxers and his socks, leaving his clothes in a heap by the bed.

Hannibal entered shortly afterward, sliding under the blankets that Will had only halfway gotten under.

Will turned his head and opened an eye, glaring disapprovingly at Hannibal's matching pajama set.

"Take your shirt off."

Hannibal raised an eyebrow.

"I beg pardon?"

"I don't. Take your shirt off."

After a moment's pause, Hannibal did as he was told, folding up the garment and putting it on his nightstand. With great effort, Will hauled himself one inch to the left, smushing his face into Hannibal's shoulder and throwing an arm across his waist.

“Love you,” he mumbled into Hannibal’s skin.

For a long moment, Hannibal said nothing, the only sound in the room the click of the lamp chain as he turned off the light. Will was on the precipice of sleep when he felt lips on the top of his head, a mimic of the kiss he had given minutes before.

“I love you, mylimasis.”

Will drifted off to sleep on cloud nine.

Chapter End Notes

Last updated over a year ago???? I've got to get my shit together lol.

For real though every email ao3 sends me about this story brings a little light into my day <3 Now that we're no longer quarantining, work and friends and general life stuff has kept me away, but they've got Hannibal on Hulu now and I'm doing a rewatch!! I will, at the very least, finish this story, but I'm hoping to keep the momentum going enough to put up the sequel as well.

I want to say, from the bottom of my heart, that I really appreciate everyone who has read, kudosed, bookmarked, and especially commented on this work. You guys mean a lot to me and I'll try to update (the final chapter!!) soon <3

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!